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ACORN USER



Space

Accessing more flash memory

Internet News
- Getting yourself set-up properly
- Latest news on the Internet

Education Extra
- Reviewing the Kudliansoft CD compilation
- TextEase Database plus all the latest news

Amazing scanner offer page 53

Plus
- Olympus C-2020Z digital camera reviewed
- Creating presentations with NoticeBoard Pro
- How to really get connected to the 'Net
- Discover how RISC OS sells Landrover

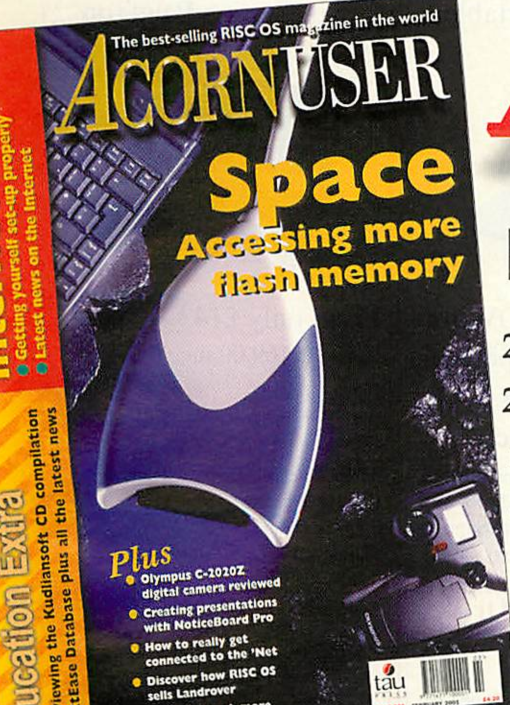
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February 2001

ACORNUSER



Features

Regulars

March issue on sale 22nd February 2001



This month it's all coming together again just like we would all like it to in real life – in this case I'm talking about the magazine which is quite a way from real life.

We're had the review of the Olympus camera planned for sometime and then along comes Neil Farnham-Smith with his CompactFlash reader software and we've got seven pages on portable electronics.

And then we've had the new series on getting connected for beginners ready for a while awaiting it's slot and then, don't you know it, but Richard Roberts pops up with his comparison on the Internet on RISC OS with Internet on the PC. It's quite satisfying when it all comes together.

Did you make any New Year Resolutions? I make it a general rule not to, then you can't let yourself down. However if there's one that you could make it might be to proselytise less and promote more.

Nobody likes a computer bore and if there's one thing that will put someone off a new system is the character who spends his time gloating over how much better his machine is than yours.

It's the successes of RISC OS, and the more auspicious the better, that make it valued and important. The fact that a very large percentage of TV graphics are generated from RISC OS is a good one and there are others. Let 'em know that RISC OS is in use in industry as well as in the home. Industry Standard? Which industry is that then?

As a final note here's a thought for you: Much is made of the ability of RISC OS in the schools and there's nothing wrong with that. But "most people" own PCs. That's also fine because after they've learned how to use a computer on those boring old Model 'T' Fords – perhaps they should go out and buy a Lamborghini.

RISC OS, the professional's computer.

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requires RISCOS 3.6 /3.7 * requires RISCOS 4 or Partitioning s/w for only £25.00 + vat

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Above prices do not include monitors please see separate price list

RiscStation neTWORX RiscStation neTWORX HD



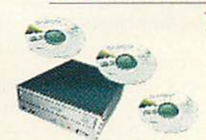
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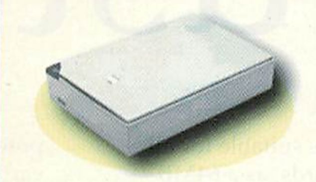
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inc VAT

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Going faster and faster, fastest?

Forty percent speed upgrades for RiscStations and other R7500 motherboards There has been some very interesting news trickling out of the RiscStation camp recently. For a long time there has been a rumour that the R7500 motherboard is being run below its true potential; those of us visiting RiscStation over the last few weeks have seen a machine working distinctly faster than our RiscStation here and apparently producing what appeared to be even more than an earlier rumoured 17% increase. RiscStation's latest announcement shows that long-standing rumour to be correct.

RiscStation are shortly to release an upgrade to the system in the form of a memory speed up. Traditionally, RISC OS reads and writes information held in RAM at 80ns but now, with its revolutionary new design of motherboard, the R7500 can access such data at 50ns. Provisionally this is a speed increase of around 40% over existing Acorn technology but more specific benchmark testing should produce more accurate results for comparison.

Since the R7500 uses RAM to support aspects of the computer such as display resolution and refresh, the effects will be instantly noticeable. RiscStation will be offering this upgrade, which is suitable for all R7500 motherboards, as a 64MB RAM 50ns SIMM exchange together with the appropriate software to implement the speed up.

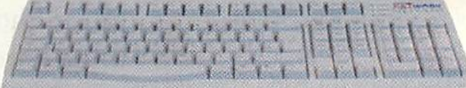
The upgrade will require the replacement of slower memory already fitted with guaranteed 50ns SIMMs. The details of the pricing for the upgrade wasn't available as we went to press but indications were that the cost would be reasonable and could be combined with increased RAM size. The details are, in any case, to be announced very shortly.

The chaps at RiscStation tell us that there are quite a few other features of the hardware for which software is still under development but they hope to be implementing more and more of these features without any cost implication to the end user. We've known from the beginning that the RiscStation could have been an even more powerful machine given more time in development. It's refreshing to see that its potential is being realised and that early purchasers aren't being penalised.

At the end of their press release RiscStation offer us this comment: "The RiscStation R7500 computer remains the most feature-packed RISC OS computer on the market today and at the price it is well worth a look." If they continue with this development we'll have to agree.

RiscStation 168 Elliott Street, Tyldesley, Manchester M2 8DS tel: 01942 797777 fax: 01942 797711 e-mail: **info@riscstation.co.uk**







It's a late late christmas

RComp have been busy sending out Christmas presents to their customers. Over the last weeks of 2000 a new version of *DialUp* (1.42) and *WebsterXL* (1.97c) were e-mailed to registered users. Once they'd recovered from their celebrations they also sent out an even newer version of *DialUp* (1.45) and *Anthem* (2.12).

The new version of *DialUp* includes call logging to help you keep track of calls to internet providers and also allows internet accounts to be copied so that additional accounts with one provider can be easily added. The New Year version allowed other applications to trigger mail/news fetches via *DialUp*.

WebsterXL now allows text to be highlighted with drag'n'drop to other applications. Those experiencing JavaScript problems with older versions may find the problems have been solved as have other rendering difficulties. Background graphics are now supported and RComp are now able to work on alternative 'looks' for the program — and they are in the process of making a number of new looks available.

RComp's MIDI sequencer, *Anthem*, now has improved and extended handling of System Exclusive (SysEx) events. This allows users easier control of the extra features available on modern MIDI keyboards.

R-Comp 22 Robert Moffat, High Legh, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6PS Tel: (+44) 01925 755043 Fax: (+44) 01925 757377 **www.rcomp.co.uk**

User Groups

In the news about *riscos.org.uk* we mention a user group named M25EROUG. In full this is the M25 East RISC OS User Group, formerly known as the East London West Sussex Acorn User Group. The group will meet on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7pm at Harold Court School, Church Road, Harold Wood RM3 0SH. There is no subscription fee. **www.m25eroug.riscos.org.uk**

Members of another User Group, a touch further north (Manchester) are advised to check before meetings. At present meetings are held every 3rd Wednesday at The Bank at Sale but a change of management at the pub has resulted in cancellation of practically everything other than the MAUG meetings. If members don't see an e-mail notice they should check with John Cartmell before travelling any distance for a meeting. **john@cartmell.demon.co.uk** *www.manchester.riscos.org.uk*

Watch out for Super VRAM

Simtec have recently brought out a new 2Mb VRAM module that builds on the high reliability of its predecessor. The new module reduced the chip count to four from the tradition eight used previously on all other VRAM upgrades. This has the advantage of reducing bus loading, power consumption, and component count. The overall size reduction enabled them to produce a cleaner layout for the design which minimizes track length and impedance mismatch on the VRAM bus.

As well as being rightly famous for their high quality work, Simtec have recently received praise for their very special after-sales service. Iain Williamson was having a problem with his machine which resulted in one of Simtec's VRAMs being left redundant on his desk. Iain publicised the fact in an Acorn newsgroup and received an e-mail from Gareth Simpson of Simtec giving advice on how the VRAM socket might be braced to allow the VRAM to be inserted.

Of course we could congratulate Gareth for spending his time reading every newsgroup (although I know he's far too busy to even contemplate doing any such thing). Perhaps we should all appreciate that RISC OS dealers and developers do seriously want us to get the best out of our systems and will offer reasonable after sales service — just as long as we have read the manual and double or treble checked that we've followed the instructions first!



riscos.org.uk

RISC OS Central are offering HTTP and frames redirection for those involved in producing RISC OS applications. HTTP redirection is new and is available for all existing and future **riscos.org.uk** domains. This means that, whatever the actual web address of an application it can be reached by typing **<something>.riscos.org.uk**

So far the <something> includes *tiles* and *solitaire* mentioned elsewhere in these columns, together with *drwimp*, *freeze*, *graphdraw* and *Zap* (among many others). For example, the *Zap* (programmers' editor) page can be reached by typing **www.zap.riscos.org.uk** (or even just **http://zap.riscos.org.uk**).

User groups and developers are also included in the scheme and so far include London, *m25eroug*, manchester and stdevel This gives easy to remember links to your essential sites and although I know Stuart Tyrrell has a number of links to his site I'll probably find *stdevel.riscos.org.uk* the easiest to remember.

More details at **www.riscos.org.uk**

New hardware connections

A new high end printer is now fully supported on the RISC OS platform with a driver for the excellent Canon BJC8200 photo printer. The printer produces excellent prints which are comparable with traditional film or dye-sublimation output.

The PhotoReal driver fully supports the maximum 1200x1200 dpi (40% higher than Epson's 1440x720) and also the advanced microfine Droplet Technology. It supports Canon's six colour photo ink system and utilises the BC50 cartridge which has cost-efficient separate tanks for each colour.

Independent reviews suggest that Canon has stolen the ink-jet photo printer crown from Epson with this printer. Reports are that the BJC8200 produces absolutely stunning results, especially when using Canon's PR101 paper, but it is not at all suitable for general document printing except in emergencies.

It is not a dual purpose printer like the BJC7100. It will of course print from any RISC OS program apart from those that are raw text editors such as !Edit.

All printer functions such as print quality, media type, feed path and printer alignment are supported in the RISC OS PhotoReal Driver.

The Canon BJC8200 with PhotoReal driver for RISC OS is available from Photodesk for £350.00 including VAT and UK mainland carriage. Plus Photodesk have now provided *PhotoLink* support for the C2100 Ultra Zoom Camera from Olympus. This camera has the following features:

All in one 10x Zoom with optical image stabiliser Electronic viewfinder giving true SLR capability 1600x1200 resolution Sound Quicktime movie TFT screen Smartmedia removable memory

The model has a bright F2.8 lens delivering zoom performance equivalent to a 38 mm — 380 mm lens on a 35 mm camera. A built-in optical image stabilisation system assures the user obtains sharp and clear results even when shooting at up to 10x magnification. Activating the 2.7x digital zoom, secures a 27x magnification. The image presented in the innovative electronic viewfinder corresponds exactly to the view captured through the lens just like a conventional SLR camera. The C-2100 Ultra Zoom has a huge array of precise metering options, numerous manual controls and further functions such as movie and sound recording.

C2100UZ camera with RISC OS *Photolink* from *Photodesk* including VAT and UK carriage £900.00

Chris Hornby, Photodesk Ltd. 1 The Courtyard, Southwell Business Park, Portland, Dorset, DT5 2NQ, UK **www.photodesk.ltd.uk** Tel:+44 1305 822753 Fax:+44 1305 860483 mailto: **chris@photodesk.ltd.uk**

In brief

FTPc gets an editor

Some of you may be using *FTPc* to transfer files to and from Internet sites. With *FTPc* it is possible to edit the user menu but not everyone may be confident about making the changes. A third-party editor, *FTPcEdit* is now available from **www.patrick-mortara.de/comp/acorn.htm**

If *FTPcEdit* has been seen by the filer the it is automatically loaded when you click on User menu -> Edit in FTPc and you can then easily set up your user menu without needing to understand the user menu file. Whether you find it easier depends on your style of working — but as the program is free it's well worth finding out.

Patrick Mortara
www.patrick-mortara.de

Match those sites

Those of you with a Web site will know of the problem of keeping the site up to date and checking that the site matches the copy of your site that you keep on your hard drive. *Sitematch* from Dave Edwards helps you keep the real site and your copy synchronised. The latest version v 1.10 has had more changes than any previous version and should interact correctly with a range of filing systems. Files can be excluded from upload/deletion and there is provision for proxies, gateways and firewalls. If you have a Web site it's worth checking out as the only cost of the program is a Thank you to Dave (possibly with a list of ideas for improvement).

www.dave-edwards.com/riscos/software

Solitaire

Ian Macfarlane has announced the release ofa new version of *Solitaire* (including a version for younger children) at **www.solitaire.riscos.org.uk**

Whilst you're there you might have a look at Ian's Tiles program that has been available for some time.

Ian Macfarlane

Continued...

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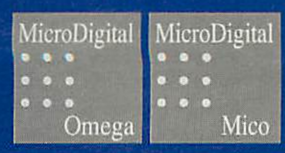
Acorn

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RiscStation Computers

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The Lite+ model is the same as the Lite, but has an 8.4Gb HD and 64Mb RAM fitted as standard.
R7500 Lite+ — To Lite prices, please add £94.00

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R7500 Scorcher — To Lite prices, please add £315.00
R7500 Scorcher Twindeck (as Scorcher, with additional 48x CD drive) — To Lite prices, add £349.00

The Networx model is a Lite without the HD or CD fitted. Monitors are available as with the Lite.
R7500 Networx (no monitor) — £480.00

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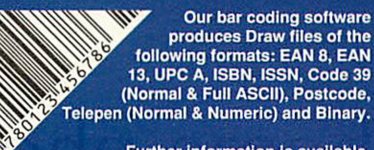






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Something new is coming soon...

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Sibelius for Windows is also available	
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Omega SCSI 2 PCI card	£72.95
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Printers	£Call
Risc PC second slice (no PSU)	£95.00
RISC OS 4 (fitting available)	£120.00
RiscStation internal modem pack	£99.95
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Digital home photos

Last month we mentioned the problems caused by Kodak ceasing their excellent PhotoCD system. We're still waiting for the Boots replacement for this — teething troubles have reportedly produced a delay until at least the end of February.

In the meantime Geoffrey Booth has reminded us of the Jessops service which seems to be as good as Kodak Photo CD and is still available.

Details from our local Jessops indicate that a 24 exposure film can be processed giving 6x4 prints, together with CD images, for £9.98. The CD will contain five images of each shot from 96 x 64 pixels up to 1536 x 1024 pixels. For an extra £4 a sixth set of images at 3072 x 2048 pixels can be included.

Jessops can also produce large size prints from JPEG images from CD or floppy disk (PC formatted with JPEG files named as a PC files — eg fred.JPG). For an A5 print the cost is £2.30 and for A4, £4.60. At our local Jessops this is available immediately in-store but that may vary across the country.

We'll let you know when we hear that Boots have sorted out their problems and in the meantime we'd like to hear about anywhere else that provides good quality photographs on CD that can be used by RISC OS machines.

More flat screens

ExpLAN publish the HolyBible software and consequently have customers who need a high resolution monitor in order to have multiple windows with clearly readable text. Up to now this has been very expensive using LCD monitors. The new L17A monitor allows a maximum resolution of 1360x1024 using ExpLAN's own monitor definition file for RISC OS.

Anyone looking for a large range of colours may also be pleasantly surprised as LCD screens allow a low refresh rate so that the available bandwidth can be used to allow larger numbers of colours at high resolution. For example the MDF for the L17A can deliver 32-thousand colours at 1024x768 whilst running at a bandwidth of 130MB/sec — achievable by a standard RiscStation R7500 (which doesn't use VRAM).

The LCD monitor achieves this by refreshing the screen at only 60Hz — a frequency low enough to show pronounced flicker on a standard CRT screen, which would be expected to induce eye-strain, leading to headaches. The L17A provides the extra resolution and/or colours required by graphic-artists, but at a lower price-premium. It will also be favoured by web-page designers and programmers who can place the editing tool windows alongside those showing the resultant image (for which a screen at 1024x768 is too tight).

Of course it's not possible to just expect any LCD monitor to plug into your computer and work at any resolution you happen to choose and ExpLAN have used their expertise in this area to produce their own MDF (for RISC OS 3.5 or later) which is provided with the monitors. In trying to justify buying an LCD (rather than a CRT) screen you might consider that there is:

- No X-ray radiation hazard
- No flickering of the display
- No high-voltage risks (crt screens typically use 25Kv)
- Consequential diminution of static electricity charge on-screen
- Lower power consumption (typically 70% less than a crt)

and the LCD screens are smaller and lighter Specifications extracts: Resolution — (max)1360 x 1024 (using RISC OS MDF) Power — (max)60 Watts IDimensions — h405 w467 d120 excl stand View angle — 160° hor & vert Warranty — 3 years, swap-out.

Including the RISC OS MDF the price is £999+VAT ExpLAN Computers Ltd PO Box 32, Tavistock, Devon PL19 8YU 01822 613868 **www.explan.co.uk**



In brief

www.maceng.demon.co.uk/BG/solitaire.html

Plig it!

Plig 2 is more than a mere upgrade. It is five games and 18,412,040 bytes of sheer addictiveness. Those who have suffered the mental torment of Plig will turn at once to www.skullsoft.co.uk and never mind the download time; though it is, quite substantially, squashed.

Don't forget to send feedback to Chris Egan as this release will include bugs and note that it has minimal documentation.

Those of you who have so far escaped the clutches of *Plig* can find the original game (at a mere 1/50th the size) from the same address. Be warned. Downloading *Plig* now may lead you to 'just have to' download *Plig 2* later!

Skullsoft Chris Egan
chris@limewolf.co.uk
www.limewolf.co.uk/
chris@jewel.freeserve.co.uk

TextAreas

We've been working with the new TextArea module that Martin Wurthner has produced. It's clear that it has added a substantial facility to *Artworks* giving rotatable, multi-column text areas and it's something that we'll need to report on in depth.

Martin sells his software for *Artworks* as individual modules and now in collections. The Classic Modules Collection (12 modules for £40) includes all the modules released between 1996 and 1999. The Update Collection (3 modules for £50) is the modules released in 2000 and the New Full Set Collection (all 15 modules for £70) is all the modules together. TextArea on its own is available for £35.

Martin Wuerthner MW Software Mannheimer Str. 18 67655 Kaiserslautern Germany martin@mw-software.com www.mw-software.com

Contacting AU

news@acornuser.com
John Cartmell

Beginning

Back in issue 228 (*Acorn User*, Christmas) I extolled the virtues of *Draw*. Now it's no use saying how nice *Draw* is unless we actually use it — and I don't mean just for loading clip-art.

I use *Draw* every day. For the past 7 or 8 years I've used it to produce snippets of art for illustrating hand-outs and homework sheets. For the last year I've also used it to produce ideas and to start designs for the board games that I produce for Fleur Designs. Admittedly I complete those designs using *ArtWorks* — *Draw* does have its limitations — but I don't have *ArtWorks* on the 8-year old computer that is installed in my workshop and ideas need to be rendered as they are conceived else they disappear into the aether.

This is for beginners, and what follows is part of a lesson I have given to year 7 pupils (11 year olds). It's an exercise they all have to complete and in which they all succeed (more or less). The lesson for you, is that you too can produce your own artwork.

The task is to complete a *Draw* version of the *Draw* icon from RISC OS 3.

I'm afraid I'll be using the toolbar from the RISC OS 4 version (so may look slightly different from yours if you have an older machine) but the operations are the same.

The first task is to load and run *Draw* then to get the program to help you; you are going to draw straight lines so use the grid. You need to both show and lock the grid (F1 and shift+F1). While we're following good practice you should now save your work (F3) giving the file an appropriate name (DrawIcon) and dragging the file somewhere suitable (a directory called MyWork).

Open up the window (top right icon). We're going to work in the right-hand side of the window and place the completed parts of the work at the left hand side.

Click on the circle icon and then Menu -> Style -> Line width -> 2 Drag out a circle then with the Select tool drag the circle into its correct place. (Figure I) Use the straight line tool to produce the legs of the compasses/dividers then move them into place (Figure II).

Draw the screw for the top of the compasses (too large is OK) then select both parts of the cross and group them (Control+G). Select the group and drag the bottom ear until

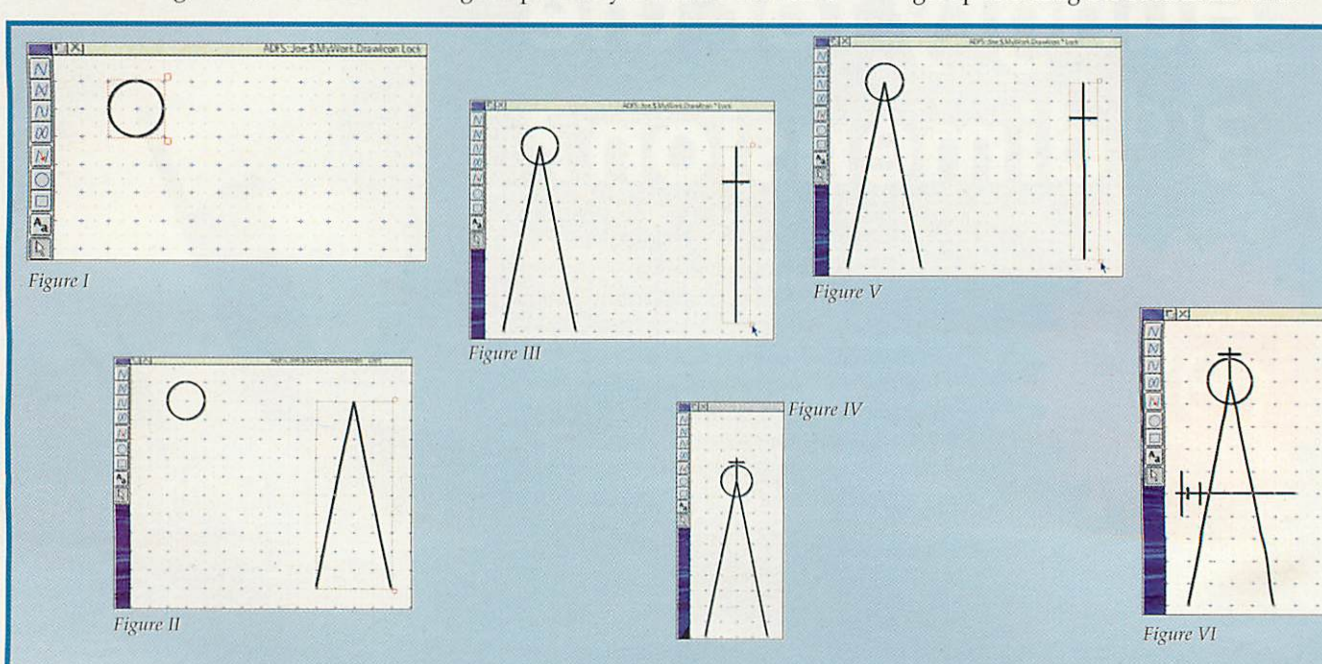


Figure I

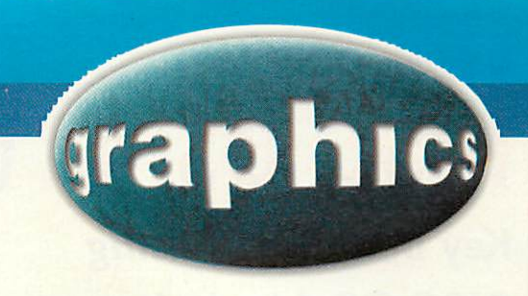
Figure II

Figure III

Figure IV

Figure V

Figure VI



with Draw

the cross is the correct shape and size (Figure III) and move it into position (Figure IV).

Draw the horizontal screw the same way (Figure V). Select all parts of the compass and group them together.

(You are saving your work regularly aren't you? Press F3 and click on OK.) Now for the pencil. Use the joined line tool — because you're going to want to fill-in the areas that you draw.

Draw the outline using the joined *line tool* then a rectangle using the joined line or rectangle tool. Select the line tool and fill it with light green Style -> Fill colour -> (choose colour) -> OK then give it a dark green line (Style -> Line colour -> (choose) -> OK and increase the width of the line (Style -> Line width -> 4) (Figure VI).

Select then copy (Control+C) the rectangle and make it half-width using the bottom ear and copy the thin rectangle (Figure VII). Put the rectangles into place (Figure VIII). Draw the tip of the pencil with the joined line tool and change the colours (Figure IX) then move it into place. Draw the black tip of the pencil (Figure X) and reduce it to the correct size.

The grid lock will stop you moving the tip into position. There are a number of ways round the problem including changing the grid resolution. The fastest is to unlock the grid (Shift+F1) move the tip by eye then re-lock (Shift+F1). Don't forget to re-lock.

Select all the pencil and group. Select the pencil and compass and group.

Finish. (Figure 11) If your finished version is anything like mine then you are now capable of adding simple illustrations to any document you produce — all you need is practice and there are more tutorials in the paper and electronic versions of the RISC OS Guide — in the chapter called *Draw* (Chapter 17 p173 in my versions).

It's a far cry from high-quality artwork — but it's a quick, simple illustration.
And it's all yours.

Contacting AU

graphics@acornuser.com
John Cartmell

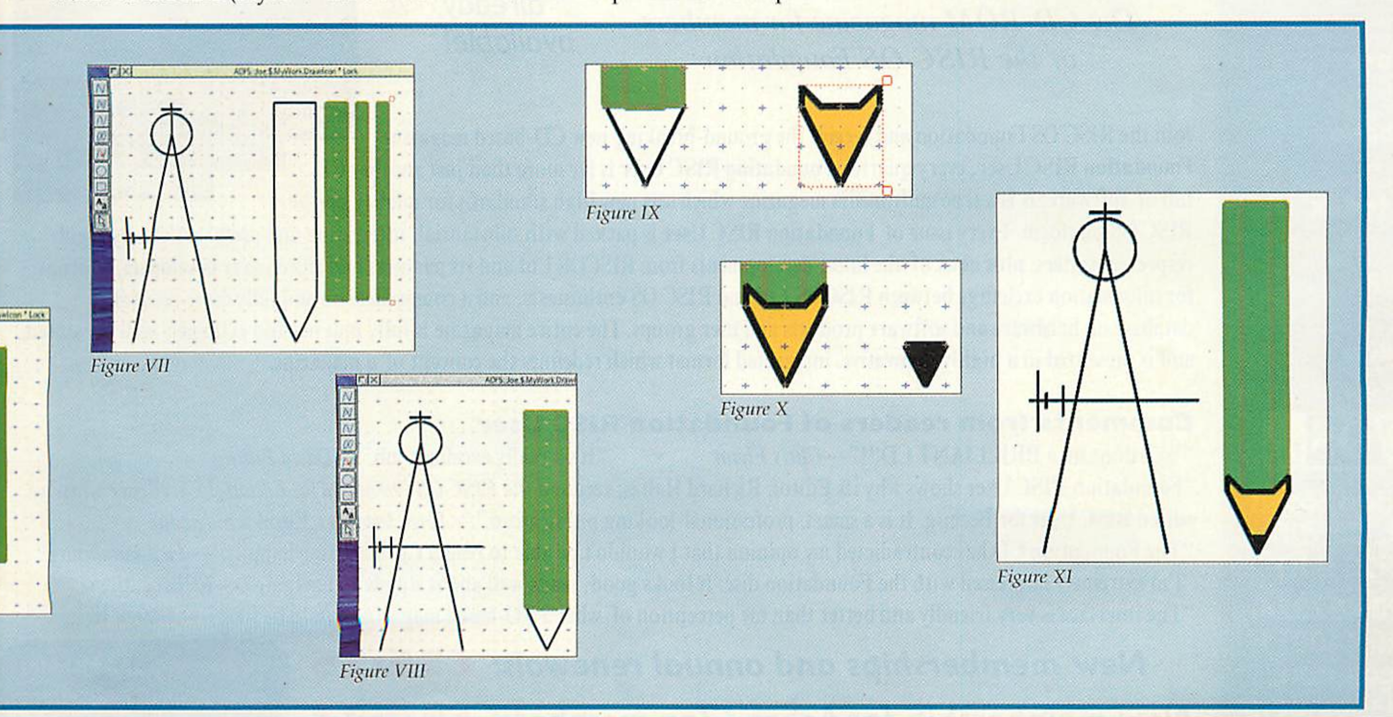


Figure VII

Figure VIII

Figure IX

Figure X

Figure XI

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"**Foundation RISC User** shows why its Editor, Richard Hallas, received the *RISC OS '99 Award for Editorial Excellence* when he edited **RISC User** for Beebug. It is a smart, professional-looking publication."—*Peter Jennings*, **Eureka** *magazine*
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Painting by numbers

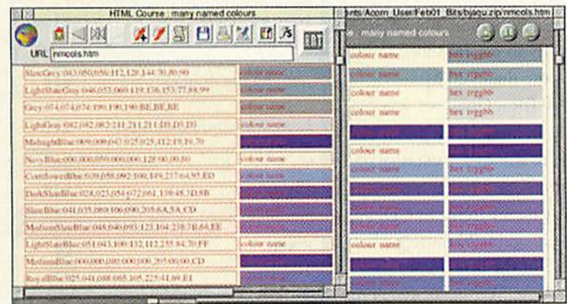
The World Wide Web Consortium's three goals are universal access for all whatever culture or ability, semantic environment that makes best use of each user's available resources, and careful consideration of the emerging legal, commercial and social issues raised. But while W3C has been trying to lay the foundations for the Web and its next generation with standard technical specifications, other interests have been going their own ways.

This causes the problem RISC OS Web browsers face every day, where *Oregano* can't access this site, *Fresco©* crashes on that site, or another site defeats *WebsterXL*.

Even *MS Internet Explorer* and *Netscape* can have trouble with Web sites designed for each other; a practice which completely ignores the W3C mission.

Giving graphic content to Web pages also excludes some users from universal access, but as colour is an available resource for the majority of users, most expect to see colour on their screens. Choosing and specifying Web colours universally across different browsers and platforms is more of a problem.

Brian Jaques' Web site features his *HTML Assist* section which gives guidance on Web page colour specifications, with colour swatch charts and Javascript utilities to show the effect of different foreground and background combinations. The HTML 4.0 specification includes only sixteen named colours, but Netscape has defined 455 colours with names like "Moccasin" (beige), "thistle" (pale mauve) and "chartreuse" (green).*Fresco* knows about half of these names, *Oregano* about a third and *WebsterXL* about a quarter.



All three can easily display all 455 colours in the swatch when the red, green and blue saturation values in the hexadecimal range x00-xFF are specified instead, and viewed in a high enough screen colour depth. So forget the fancy names and always paint by numbers.

Brian Jaques HTML Assist
www.jaques.demon.co.uk/htx/htx.htm

Security RISC

There are plenty of people out there on the big bad Internet who will try to get inside your computer while it's online if they can, and Web sites you visit will try to find out all about you from what your browser tells them.

Just try the Privacy Analysis at **www.privacy.net/anonymizer** to see how much information escapes, even from a RISC OS browser. You can see that my name and my (fake) ANT Suite registration details are being given out by Fresco, and I can't easily prevent it from happening. Paul Vigay's "big brother browser page" (link at the foot of **www.vigay.com/riscos/inet.html**) tells a similar story. Fortunately for us, RISC OS as an operating system is much more secure from external attack than say, Windows.

So if you do allow RISC OS to use a Windows PC as a gateway to an always-on broadband Internet connection, it's essential to protect your gateway and network by running secure firewall software on the PC, or fit a hardware firewall such as the D-Link DI-701 Residential Gateway (**www.dlink.co.uk/ products/broadband/ di701.html**).

URL file:/ADFS::HardDisc4/$/DTP/Documents/Acorn_User/Feb01_Bits/anonymizer

Your Browser Type and Operating System:
Mozilla/5.01 (compatible; Fresco 2.13; RISC OS)

All information sent by your web browser when requesting this web page:
Accept: text/html, image/gif, image/jpeg, image/pjpeg, image/png, */*; q=.2 Accept-Language: en
Connection: Keep-Alive Host: privacy.net User-Agent: Mozilla/5.01 (compatible; Fresco 2.13; RISC OS)
Cookie: Privacy.net=Privacy+Analysis; Date=12/18/00 X-Licensee: fq0uiJUSABsw023d:David Dade

You have been warned.

In brief

Arrest that Spam

Launched in 1998 by Julian Haight, SpamCop.net helps you punish spammers for sending you junk e-mail by contacting their Internet providers for you and helping to get their accounts closed down. The SpamCop subscription-based service can fetch, log and pre-filter your e-mail, maintaining black and white lists of blocked and allowed senders.

The SpamCop free reporting service will send e-mail on your behalf using your own e-mail address to the appropriate network administrators. This has a Web-based interface where you cut and paste the spam into a form, or forward the spam complete with headers directly to spam@spamcop.net

SpamCop
http://spamcop.net

Rip Attachments

If you've ever received an e-mail containing a unintelligible attachment called winmail.dat, it's sometimes possible to recognise inside it the typical "yoya" intro signature of an JPEG picture file. DeTNEF by Geoff Youngs is a simpler solution which can rip most attachments from an e-mail sent by a Windows Outlook user unwittingly using the proprietary Microsoft Transport Neutral Encapsulation Format or TNEF. Thomas Boll's original Unix program was ported by Geoff to become DeTNEF, which extracts the attached file and attempts to retrieve the filename and set an appropriate file type.

DeTNEF
http://software.solutionsweb.co.uk/tnef/

Contacting me

David Dade:
comms@acornuser.com

SLEUTH3
OCR Software for RISC OS

The market leading RISC OS Optical Character Recognition software. This new version from APDL and ProAction is available on CD and includes Sleuth 2. It converts scanned images of text into an ASCII or RTF file with an accuracy of over 97%. Sleuth 2 is not as sophisticated as Sleuth 3 but on clear images may be faster.

Sleuth 2 £29 Sleuth 3 £49

Upgrade from Sleuth 2 to Sleuth 3 £25

Prices include VAT and UK cariage

Interactive !Draw Tutorial

A new CD from APDL
Written by Tom Beeley

!Draw is a very powerful program, but the manual supplied with the computer is not very helpful. This CD is a comprehensive tutorial, with lots of example Drawfiles for you to practice on. You can either treat it as a step by step tutorial, and there's evem a checksheet for you to tick off each lesson, or just 'browse' and learn about the things that interest you. **£14.50**



Low cost desktop C++ compiler previously sold by BEEBUG. Now on CD with Manual and Tutorial. Printed manuals are available at extra cost. Includes modifications to work with RISC-OS 4, !EasyDebug and Library source code

£29

APDL ProAction *Manual* **£20**

The new APDL *Turbo* Processor upgrade

*Prices include VAT and assume that you have an appropriate Strong ARM processor in good working order to exchange. **Please add £3.50 UK carriage.***

The Turbo processor upgrade is a part exchange processor for any Strong ARM Risc PC. It has a boosted clock rate and other additions to increase speed. This method of improving performance has been widely used by enthusiasts, and the Turbo 287 can give a speed increase of between 15 and 30 percent depending on the type of program being run.

Most users are naturally apprehensive about carrying out this type of work. It is possible that the processor could be damaged, as not all will work reliably at high speed, leaving you with a dead computer and a bill for a new Strong ARM. The APDL Turbo upgrade removes the uncertainty of running a fast processor, and is guaranteed for 1 year so there's no risk.

Upgrade prices

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Turbo 275	- 275 Mhz upgrade from S/ARM 202 or 233 Mhz	£39
Turbo 287	- 287 Mhz upgrade from S/ARM 202 Mhz or 233 Mhz	£49
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The program for family historians and genealogists. Very easy to use. Imports !Ancestry 1 and II, !Family, CSV and GEDCOM and exports as GEDCOM or CSV. Can save as cross referenced HTML, with pictures, so you can pass data on to people who have a computer but no genealogy software, or upload to your web site. Powerful and flexible reporting and searching. Unlimited information storage, you aren't restricted to a few lines of text and a picture. *Ancestor+* is based on the program that Graham Crow was working on at the time of his death, which was a development of his original *Ancestry*. Price just **£59**

Upgrades from Ancestor I and Ancestor II available



Data Safe - A new concept in backup and data security

DataSafe consists of an external case to hold a 3.5" IDE drive, connected to your machine's printer port. This gives a large capacity portable drive, movable between machines and locations. Ideal for backup, secure data storage and transport. All the features of our ideA card, partitioning, passwords, etc. Great for schools. Supply your own drive or we'll fit one for you. Prices start at £99 or with 10 Gb drive £178 or 16.8 Gb £189

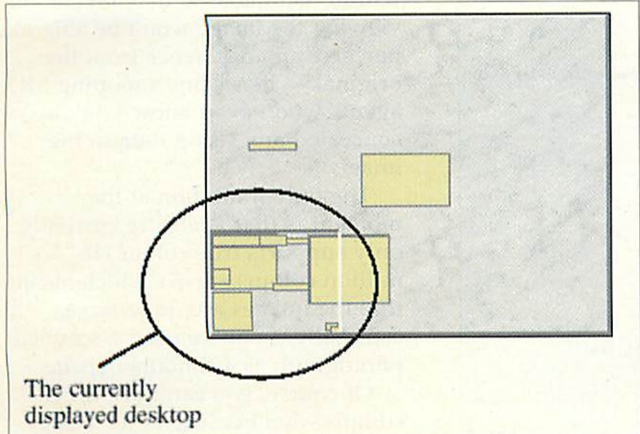
DataSafe is highly praised, but there's been one criticism. People would like it smaller and lighter so carrying between home and office (or school) is even easier. So we've introduced the DataSafe 'mini'. With all the features of the standard version, this uses a 2.5" drive so it's very small, about 5" by 5" and less than 2" high, and weighing only about 14 ounces! Prices start at £99 without a drive or with a 1.8 Gb drive just £169



Bigger desktops

Like *Workspace*, examined back in September, *VirtuDesk* is a virtual desktop manager. However, instead of selecting which desktop you want to use from an iconbar controller, *VirtuDesk* uses a Linux-like visual panel window from which you can easily see which parts of the virtual desktop control visible windows.

You can thus manage your virtual desktops either by clicking on the relevant panel or by dragging the required area.


The currently displayed desktop

By default the virtual area is nine times the size of your screen mode — 3x3 desktops. A small panel shows which part of the desktop you are currently viewing, and to move around you simply click on the relevant area of the panel.

Window positions are stored and restored when you click on the selected area. This makes navigation much easier than some of the virtual desktops that scroll around when the mouse touches the edge of the screen.

VirtuDesk is configurable so that you can define the size of the virtual screen, if you require more than a 3x3 area or you want the navigation panel to appear bigger or smaller. The actual screen position of the panel is also configurable so you can position it exactly to suit your preference.

It's easy and straightforward to use but comprehensive documentation is provided anyway. *VirtuDesk* is written and supported by David Llewellyn-Jones aka 'The Flying Pig', and available to download from **www.mat.bham.ac.uk/llewelld/dnload.htm**

Right on the button

Also written by David Llewellyn-Jones is a very handy module called *ButtonBar*, which has the ability to add small toolbars to any application which uses key shortcuts. These appear attached to the requisite application whenever one of its windows has the input focus (the caret) and appear in a similar fashion to the toolbar which sits to the left of *Draw* windows.

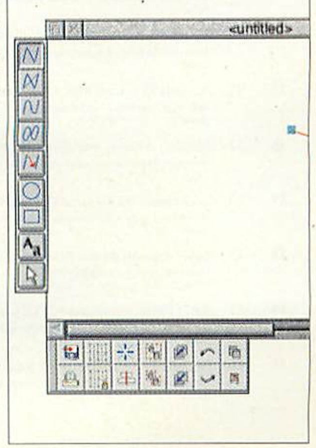
Once installed, *ButtonBar* is invisible to use other than adding the relevant toolbar. It even supports interactive help so you don't need to remember what each of the buttons does.

As the module is small and unobtrusive, the actual editing and defining of new 'ButtonBars' is carried out by a separate *BBarEdit* application supplied with *ButtonBar*. This allows you to configure the toolbar to your exact needs by specifying the size of each button, how many buttons are positioned both horizontally and vertically across the bar and any accompanying sprites and interactive help text you require.

You can also specify whether you want the final bar to appear attached to the top, bottom, left or right of the relevant application window.

Once you've assigned a specific keypress and action to each button you can save a *ButtonBar* file, which can be activated simply by double-clicking on it — as long as the *ButtonBar* module is loaded.

ButtonBar is again downloadable from David's Web site at **www.mat.bham.ac.uk/llewelld/dnload.htm** and both this and *VirtuDesk* are freeware.



Showing ButtonBar in action, attached to a standard Draw window

Coded messages

Back in September I spoke of ways to defeat the Government R.I.P. bill by hiding important files within seemingly innocent looking pictures and backdrops. Both applications reviewed then created random patterned tiles as containers to hide the data, so were not really true Steganography applications, which would involve hiding the data within a legitimate photo or original image — not a random one created specifically for the purpose.

Top Twenty Links:

Courtesy of www.riscos.org

(since 18th December 2000)

No.	Visits	Description
1	52	Printers - The standard multi purpose drivers supplied with your computer - new versions available to download, by RISC OS Ltd [more] Homepage: http://developer.riscos.com/public/Releases/Printers/ Status: Freeware
2	28	MPEG2 - Play MPEG/MPEG2 movies, by Peter Teichmann [more] Homepage: http://rcswww.urz.tu-dresden.de/~teich-p/asoft.html Status: ?
3	25	VideoPlus - converts VideoPlus codes into times and dates and vice vers, by James MacDonald [more] Homepage: http://www.netbook.demon.co.uk/ Status: Freeware
4	22	RiscAMP - RISC OS Audio MPEG Player, by Andy Boura [more] Homepage: http://www-student.lboro.ac.uk/~phajb/software/commercial/RiscAMP/ Status: ?
5	20	WavEdit - A disk based WAV format sample editor, by Robert Hancox [more] Homepage: http://www.tophole.freeserve.co.uk/software/wav.htm Status: ?
6	20	MP3Radio - A RISC OS client for playing internet radio stations using audio MPEG streams, by Philip Hardy [more] Homepage: http://www.philspages.co.uk/downloads.htm Status: ?
7	19	Pinball Wizard - Pinball game [more] Homepage: http://website.lineone.net/~simon_smith/pin.zip Status: ?
8	19	PortScan - Utility to scan TCP/IP ports, by Herbert zur Nedden [more] Homepage: http://www.rz.tu-ilmenau.de/~yahoo/portscan/index.html Status: ?
9	17	Acornet - A freeware internet suite for RISC OS, including all you need to get online, by Various authors [more] Homepage: ftp://freenet.barnet.ac.uk/pub/Acorn/acornet/ Status: ?
10	16	ArcWeb - The best freebie web browser for Acorn machines., by Stewart Brodie [more] Homepage: http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/%7Esnb94r/arcweb/ Status: ?
11	16	VProtect - Latest virus protection module, by Pineapple Software [more] Homepage: http://www.pineaple.demon.co.uk/instv.zip Status: ?
12	15	MPEG-Works - An MPEG decoder and encoder for RISC OS, by Henrik Pederson. [more] Homepage: http://login.dknet.dk/~henrik/ Status: ?
13	15	WorldTime - Nice little desktop application to display world times, by Alex Bach Anderson [more] Homepage: http://home6.inet.tele.dk/alexbach/WT.zip Status: ?
14	14	Riscster - A client for Napster, the online MP3 music community, by Rob Dimond [more] Homepage: http://www.riscster.cwc.net Status: ?
15	13	AcornICQ - Acorn RISC OS ICQ client, by Angelo Melis [more] Homepage: http://www.vigay.com/riscos/icq/ Status: ?
16	13	Sleeve - A simple emulator for the ARM instruction set, by Chris Rutter [more] Homepage: http://www.armlinux.org/projects/sleeve/ Status: ?
17	13	Socketeer - An internet dialler, by Matthew Bloch [more] Homepage: http://www.soup-kitchen.demon.co.uk/software/socketeer.html Status: ?
18	12	Zap - Arguably the best RISC OS text editor (well, it's my favourite!), by Mixed [more] Homepage: http://www.zap.uk.eu.org/ Status: ?
19	11	Any1There - Small utility to tell you the state of the printer, by Chris Flynn [more] Homepage: http://www.chrisflynn.co.uk/progs.htm Status: Freeware
20	11	DigitalCD - A desktop music player for RISC OS, by André Timmermans [more] Homepage: http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Horizon/4471/dev.htm Status: ?

Enter David Thomson, who has created possibly the first true steganography application for RISC OS. His creation, *PhotoSteg* will take an ordinary photo image such as a scan or digital photo and hide a second 'data' file within this image but without altering the format of the data. What's more, the data will be hidden within redundant space within the image so that anyone viewing the image won't be able to perceive any difference from the original — hence any snooping MI5 agents won't even know you've concealed any secret data in the image.

The only limitation at the moment is that *PhotoSteg* currently only supports true colour (16 million colour) sprites which means that the images are quite large, especially if you've used a scanned photograph as a container sprite.

Of course, you can't use JPEG compression because of its 'lossy' compression, which would mean you would corrupt your hidden file. GIF images can only work with 256 colour palettes so cannot be used either.

However, after a bit of experimentation I did find that you can convert processed images into PNG files via John Kortink's *Translator* application. As this is lossless, they can be successfully converted back into true colour sprites and will still decode to allow you to extract the original hidden data. This may give you up to a five times saving on file sizes.

PhotoSteg is freeware and can be downloaded from **http://web.ukonline.co.uk/david.thomson/riscos/index.html**

Contacting AU

Paul Vigay:
pdpage@acornuser.com

Mico

MicroDigital



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- Lightning graphics card optional
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- USB expansion
- 16bit Sound card
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- RS 232 Interfaces
- 8.4GB Hard disc
- CD ROM drive
- Floppy Disc drive
- Keyboard and Mouse
- Software
- £ 599.00 ex vat

internet ready

Nobody today would dream of buying a new computer that you had to upgrade to access the Internet, that's just crazy. So, from the 1st February 2001, Mico – the most powerful entry level RISC OS computer – will include an internal 56k modem together with our new Lynx internet software as standard plus it comes ready configured and linked to FreeUK simply plug-in, switch on and surf.

Lynx is a complete Internet suite so you can browes the web, send and recieve e-mails, keep up with all the latest gossip on the news groups, and of course, being a professionally written package, if you should get into any problem there's a free user support hot line.

Buyers upgrading from older equipment who already have a favourite ISP can simply reconfigure Lynx to log-on to the server of their choice.

As for compatiblity issues Mico runs a completely standard version of the RISC OS 4 operating system so existing commercial applications will run completely trouble-free.

Mico is the first RISC OS computer to include so many of the PC platform's reliable technologies – EDO RAM, EIDE, USB and ISA expansion.

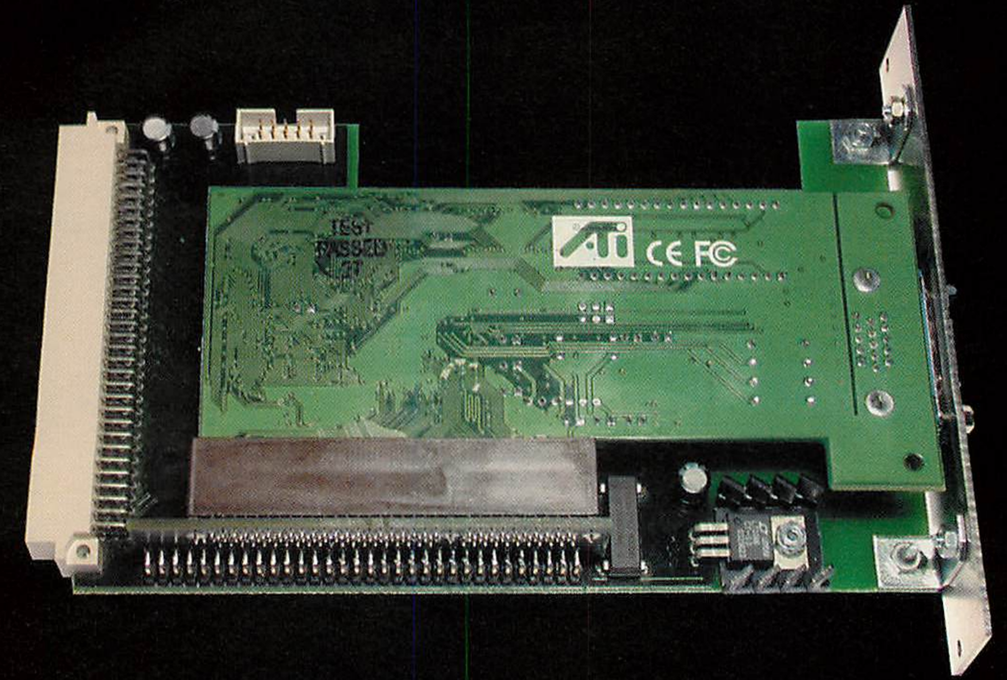
Mico's good looks will grace any working environment from the home, or office to the classroom.

Telephone for full details or see our web site. Educational discounts are available.

The Mico computer is designed and manufactured by MicroDigital Limited, 37 Titus Street, Saltaire, Shipley, West Yorkshire, BD18 4LU Telephone number 01274 618774 FAX number 01274 619482
email address sales@microdigital.co.uk web site microdigital.co.uk

Prices exclude VAT and mainland UK delivery. We welcome payment by Cheque (allow at least 5 days to clear) and Credit cards. Education Orders Welcomed.

A Risc PC displaying 1920x1440x32K or perhaps 1600x1200x16M colours ?



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For more information, see http://web.inter.NL.net/users/J.Kortink/viewfinder.htm

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ViewFinder is a product of Windfall Engineering, Aawal 53, 5211 PS, Den Bosch, Netherlands
Email : kortink@inter.nl.net. In the U.K. also available from C.J.E. Micro's (www.cje.co.uk).

Megapixel issues

Trevor Attwell takes a look at a slightly pricier digital camera

The C-2020Z digital camera from Olympus follows the basic philosophy of their model C-860L, reviewed in our September 2000 issue but with more facilities. It has a CCD of 2.1 megapixels, giving improved picture definition at 1600x1200 pixels. The difference between this and the 1280x960 of the 860 is clearly visible, and it allows more enlargement of cropped prints while retaining good resolution.

The camera runs from 4 x AA cells, and the NiMH (nickel metal hydride) type is recommended, though Lithium or common NiCd can be used. An Olympus mains power supply unit is available for indoor work — but it's far from cheap. For review purposes NiMH rechargeable batteries were used.

The camera measures approximately 110mm wide x 75mm high x 70mm deep with the lens retracted, and 90mm deep with the lens extended in the "taking" position. These dimensions, and the overall design, give it a comfortable feel. It weighs in at 305g, not including the batteries (add about 104g for NiMH). A shoulder strap is provided and it is possible to fit a wrist strap instead but this is neither supplied nor recommended.

The lens movement is electrically operated, and its length has the advantage that stray fingers are less likely to enter its field of view. The viewfinder is in the extreme top left, and the user's eye cannot move far from its center before losing part of the view. There is a focus adjustment alongside the viewfinder, which may enable spectacle wearers to take them off. I had no means of measuring its optical limits accurately, but I was able to use the finder without my +1.75 dioptre glasses. The picture actually saved is about 7% larger all round than it is shown in the viewfinder. All pictures are stored on RAM, provided on Smart Cards. These are available in the megabyte sizes 2, 4, 8, 16, 32 and 64. The minimum size you will need depends on the number and quality of photographs that you will take before downloading them into your computer (see the review of the Surftec interface in this issue). Carrying one or more spare cards can save a lot of disappointment.

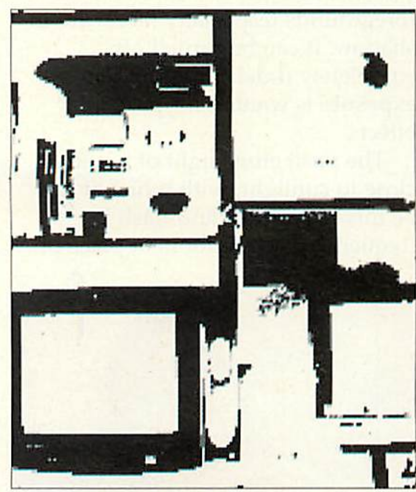
The optics

The lens has eight elements in six groups, and offers a continuous range from wide angle to telephoto, controlled by a sprung lever placed conveniently on the top right front of the camera. The shutter release occupies the middle of this lever, where it is easy to find without looking or fumbling. The optical range approximates to that of a 30-105mm lens on a 35mm camera, hence the "Z" for zoom in the type number. The aperture range is f2.0-11 at widest angle, and f2.8-11 at full telephoto.

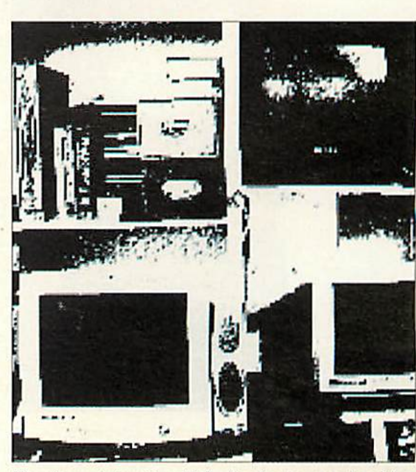
It is also possible to magnify pictures digitally up to x2.5. This does not increase the resolution, and pixels may become visible, but the facility may be useful when showing pictures to a number of people at the same time. The shutter speed range is from 1 to 1/800 second in auto mode, or 16 to 1/800s if set manually. Self-timing is available, with a delay time of about 12s, marked by the usual warning light. A remote control allows the camera to be fired from a distance. The usual LCD monitor is provided, and is bright and clear. The brightness is adjustable.

The C-2020Z has even more extras built in than the C-860L. Most are accessed via a "jog", which is a circular set of four small buttons, two in the vertical plane and two in the horizontal, which are used in various sequences. One or more additional buttons (there are five) may also be involved.

Of these, one is labelled "OK" and used to confirm that choices have been selected. Another turns the LCD monitor on or off when taking pictures, and a third opens up a three-page menu system. A fourth deals with spot metering, the use of macro mode (0.2 to 0.8m), and the combination of these, while the fifth



The two tones are reversed to give white on black.



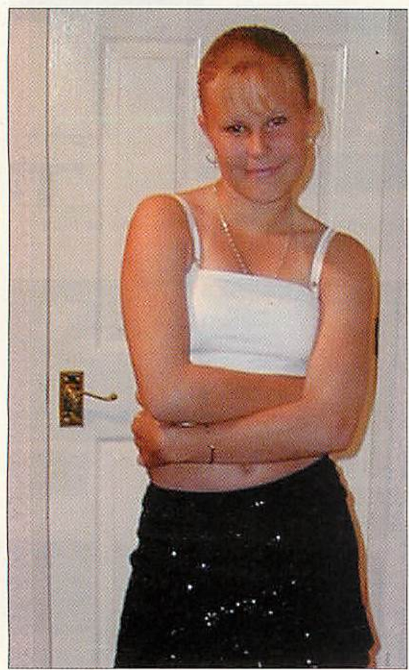
Two-tone picture in which all colours are reduced to black on white.

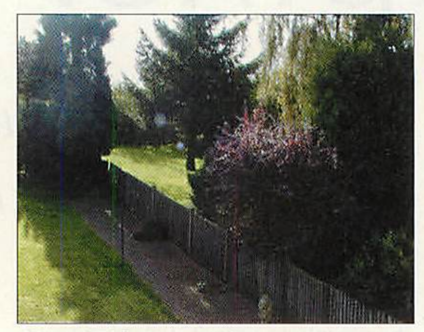

A dull day accurately portrayed

controls the various flash modes.

The built-in flash, which re-charges in about six seconds with full batteries, covers the range from 0.8 to 5.6 metres between camera and subject. In Auto mode it will fire automatically if the available light is inadequate, and a pre-flash can be added to reduce "red eye". The flash can also be used as a fill-in where foregrounds (especially faces) are in shadow. It can be turned off completely if deliberate under-exposure is wanted for particular effects.

The flash emits light of a colour close to sunlight, with which it can be mixed happily, and flash is frequently used indoors in place of


The shots of Emma were taken with flash only (except for low room lights), from distances up to about 4m, the lighting balance was consistently good on all of them.


Shot against the sun — see text

artificial light. But it is often desirable to correct the different colour rendering which appears when shooting in overcast conditions, or under artificial illuminants, such as tungsten lamps or fluorescent tubes. Optional corrections are provided for these cases. If colour errors are not noticed at the time, or cannot be avoided, an art package such as Photodesk can be used to correct them after downloading.

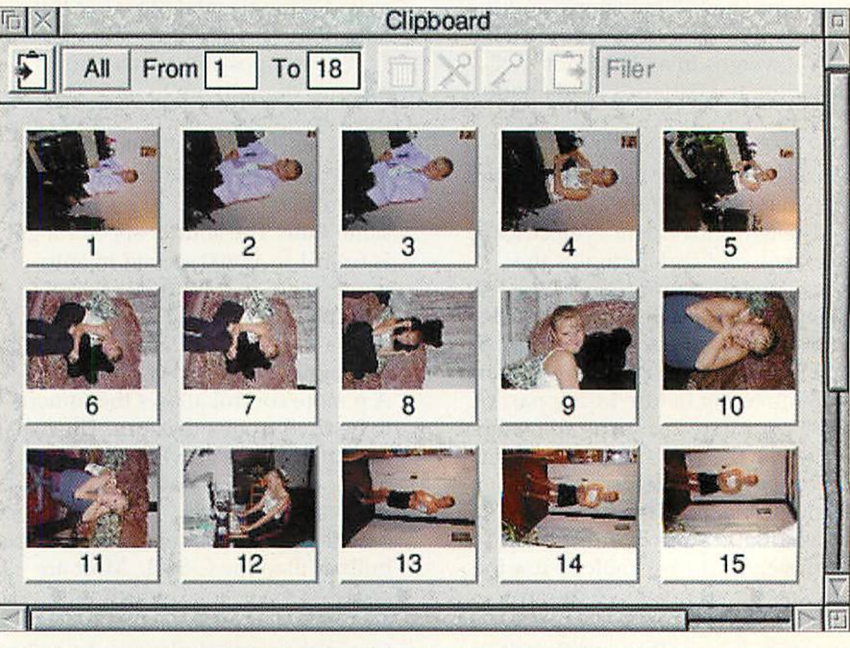
It is possible to connect an external flashgun (not supplied) to a socket on the camera. This might be used when the built-in flash cannot cope, or for special effects. But the manual lists some snags. First, the camera must be in either Manual or Aperture mode. Next, the built-in flash will continue to function as if the external flash doesn't exist, and the exposure will be set accordingly.

In practice the total flash output may be too high, particularly for persons or objects in the near field. Another note states (quote) "the extension flash may fire accidentally, depending on the circumstances". Sounds like fun, but you can always check with the LCD and throw out the duds.

A La Mode

A thumb wheel on the top right of the camera, called the Mode Dial, selects the fundamental options. Taking these in order, the first enables pictures already in store to be viewed, as described below. The next position is OFF, which disconnects the batteries. If you forget to select OFF the camera will shut down after a few minutes to save the batteries, but it starts up again if controls are touched.

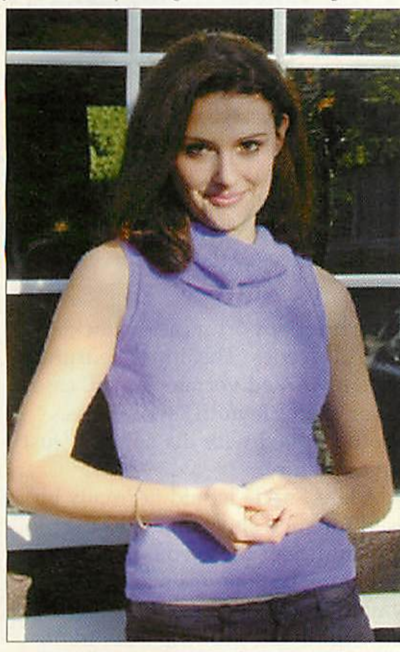
The third Mode position is labelled "P", and is used when taking pictures, also when selecting numerous operational modes. The fourth bears the letters A/S/M, standing for Aperture priority, Shutter priority and Manual operation. The last selection stores a movie, which is taken by the camera, and may be viewed on the LCD. Any



All shots taken appear on the clipboard as thumbnails in PhotoLink, Photodesk's software.



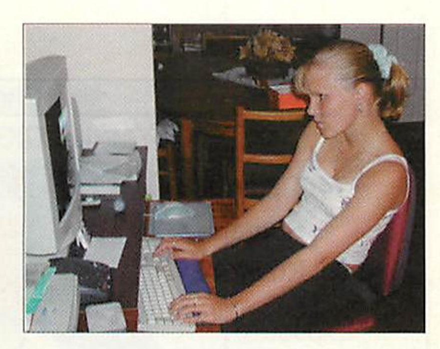
Most shots of Nicola were taken in natural light, occasionally boosted by the camera with low level flashes when needed, again all results were good.



part of the movie can be played, forward or backward, and it can be stopped at any point. The quality of the photographs can be selected by the user, bearing in mind the amount of storage available.

The manual contains a 42-entry table which shows the various possibilities, and gives the number of pictures that can be stored with each of the available memory sizes. Briefly, there are three basic recording modes, called SQ (Standard), HQ (High) and SHQ.

In SQ mode there are two image sizes to choose from, namely 640x480 or 1024x768 pixels. Each of these can



be used with either more or less data compression — the less the compression, the better the picture. HQ provides a fixed pixel size of 1600x1200, using high compression JPEG. SHQ also uses only 1600x1200 pixels, with the option of either JPEG at low compression, or uncompressed TIFF.

The number of pictures that can be taken, using these modes with an 8Mb card, ranges from 1 to 82, according to quality. The highest quality (SHQ TIFF) cannot be used at all with less than 8Mb, and you would have just 11 shots with 64Mb.

To see the results of your photography, the mode dial can be set to display the pictures held in memory. Consecutive pictures or every tenth one can be shown on the LCD, moving either forward or in reverse. The picture data can be superimposed on the picture for a short time, and includes a code number which can be used with a filing system.

This is set up for PCs, and was not tested. The pictures can be enlarged x3, or reduced to thumbnails. The frames can also be shown automatically, in sequence, each frame appearing for about 3s. A socket is provided for connection to a standard TV, if it has a video input socket.

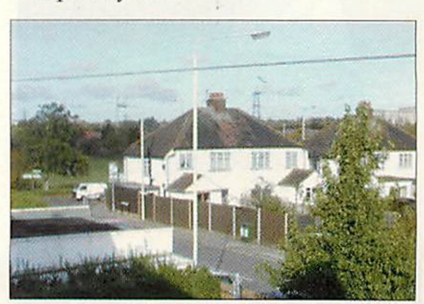
When viewing frames in the camera, the wide-angle/telephoto lever can be used to enlarge parts of the image, or to display 9 frames at a time as thumbnails. Information about the picture, including the aperture, shutter speed, and "ISO" number is given. ISO is an international measure of the sensitivity of a given film, determined under specified conditions. Here it indicates the light sensitivity of the camera. A few trials will show you which figure covers most of your work. The software which runs the camera is *Photolink*, from Photodesk, (formerly Spacetech) although now you can remove the card and download data from it automatically.

However *Photolink* provides far more extensive facilities to do with the camera itself and details were given in our September 2000 review of the Olympus C-860L camera. Suffice it to repeat that it is very easy to install and use, making operations simple and quick. Both it, the Olympus range of cameras and ancillaries are available from Photodesk (see list below).

Bells & whistles?

There are so many extras on the C-2020Z that it is quite impracticable to describe them all. The following list gives very brief descriptions of some not covered above. It is not comprehensive.

- The camera maintains a clock and calendar, and keeps track of the time and date when each photo is taken;
- Certain operations give a "beep" to indicate an operation. The sound level can be set to Off, Low, or High;
- An indication of battery condition is vital, and is provided by tiny battery symbols. I found that any indication other than OK was a bad omen, which is pretty much what the manual implies;
- No less than 22 settings can be reset to the factory values at one go! Drastic, but useful if you get completely lost;



This view appeared in the 860 camera — here the overhead cables are clearly seen, at least, in the actual print



• Each picture can be removed, or protected from erasure. Unprotected pictures can be deleted, singly or all at once;

• Panoramic scenes can be taken in sections. This calls for accurate joins between the sections, which is not easy without a rigid support, such as a good tripod, and a rotating camera head is a bonus;

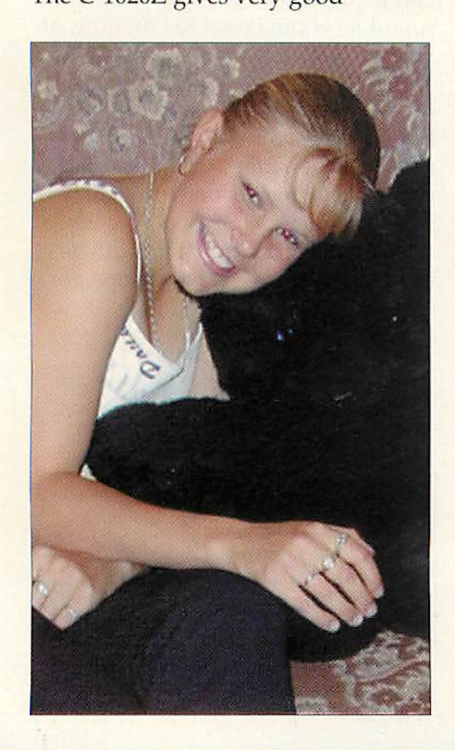
• Photos can be in colour, black and white, sepia or two-tone. The last named are either black on white or white on black, with no greys;

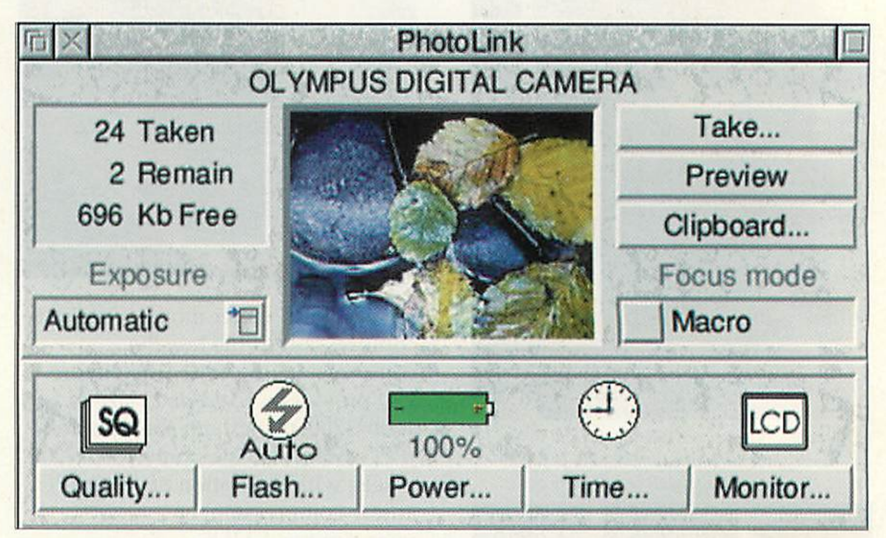
• Exposure compensation can be used where lighting conditions are difficult, for example, near bright lights which swamp parts of the picture. Or you might wish to alter the normal exposure to get a particular effect;

• To tell you what you are doing (or have already done), a control panel on top of the camera has a set of no less than 17 symbols. The LCD provides another eight in display mode, plus five in record mode, and the viewfinder chips in with an essential three.

Summary

The C-1020Z gives very good





The control panel from Photodesk's PhotoLink software

pictures, and clearly improves in resolution over the C-860L. For example, overhead high-tension electricity cables were reproduced at HQ resolution up to distances of about 300m before they became hard to pick out. This is a crude, but useful check. SHQ would have done better, but I only had a 4MB card. Beyond straightforward photography the camera has even more facilities and adjustments than the C-860L, indeed it would be interesting to know how many owners use half of them.

The English, French and German versions of the manual have all been compressed into the same space that each had to itself for the C-860L. This means less cross-referencing, few diagrams and no index. With so many features to cover, this is a pity.

At the time of the review the sun was rarely to be seen, but there were some brief opportunities to tackle difficult scenes. The auto-exposure system worked very well in all cases — for example in the shot of trees photographed with the sun only just out of picture.

A lens shade would normally be used for such shots, to avoid the appearance of those coloured "discs" and glare, but there is no obvious way to attach one. Nevertheless there was still detail showing even in the darkest areas (this may not show up in the magazine).

Altogether this camera is a very good performer. END

Thanks to our models Nicola and Emma, this time on location indoors, out of the rain! Thanks also to Herald Communications for the loan of the camera, and to Photodesk, who supplied the software.

Product details

Product:	C-2020Z, including PhotoLink software
Price:	see separate panel
Supplier:	Photodesk, 1 The Courtyard, Southwell Business Park, Portland, Dorset NT5 2NQ
Tel:	01305 822753
Fax:	01305 860483
Web:	www.photo-desk.com
E-mail:	Chris@photo-desk.com

Price Details

(all including VAT)

Olympus camera C-2020Z, including cables and software £580; Memory cards: 8Mb £30 16Mb £50 32Mb £100 64Mb £180; Direct sublimation printer (runs directly from camera and gives glossy pictures) £400; Leather carrying case £30; AC mains adaptor £70

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Nikon CoolPix 950 Premier	Best Shot - Fast Start	£ 732
Nikon CoolPix 990 Basic	2 second start up - **0.1 second shutter lag**	£ 733
Nikon CoolPix 990 Premium	2 second start up - **0.1 sec. shutter lag**	£ 809
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DigiFlash CompactFlash parallel reader for RISC OS	£ 69
DigiFlash SmartMedia parallel reader for RISC OS	£ 69



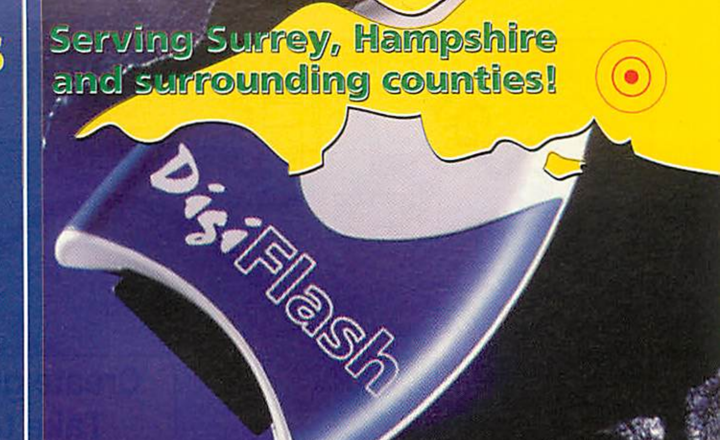
Media

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64MB CompactFlash	£ 136
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32MB SmartMedia	£ 74
64MB SmartMedia	£ 149
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DigiFlash now supports the IBM MicroDrive, either in native FAT16 or even partitioned for RISC OS (including F+ support).

Once the reader has been plugged into the parallel port and PS2 keyboard port (for power), you simply load the RISC OS driver. This device allows other parallel devices to be daisy-chained, such as printers.

When the software has been loaded, just treat the media like a floppy disc, you can copy, delete and rename files while on the CompactFlash or SmartMedia cards.

The Surftec RISC OS drivers provide an extra disc icon allowing the contents of the media to be read and loaded into your favourite Acorn photo software such as ImageMaster, ChangeFSI or PhotoDesk (also available from Surftec).

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CompactFlash Reader (inc Acorn driver)	£ 79
SmartMedia** Reader (inc Acorn driver)	£ 79
Acorn RISC OS/NC Driver*	£ 39
340MB IBM MicroDrive	**£249**
1GB IBM MicroDrive	**£429**

* Surftec driver will not work with all types of card reader, and requires a bi-directional parallel port.
** SmartMedia reader expected launch February 2001.

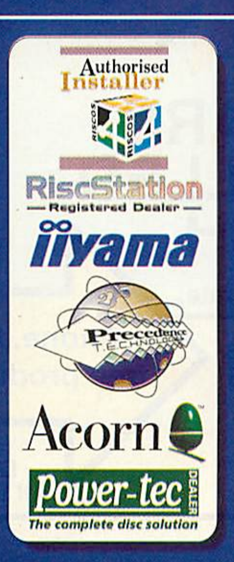


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On the cards

Steve Turnbull reports on a new area of compatibility for RISC OS

There is a new kid on the block and its name is CompactFlash (and its cousin, SmartMedia). The search for smaller and more compact media has now arrived at the level of 250Mb chip storage in a package that's about an inch (2.4cm) square — much smaller and it would probably be too easy to lose. This is a consumer item so it needs to be easy to use. Both CompactFlash and SmartMedia are based around a chip that can store a huge amount of information, in this case around 250Mb. However the design is a set of non-proprietary specifications which means that any company can come up with an appropriately storage system and if it's packaged in the right way it will work with any device that can take CompactFlash.



This is precisely what IBM did with their MicroDrive (mentioned in an earlier *Acorn User*). This is a real hard disc of tiny size, fitting into the 1in square package. In this case there was a certain amount of in-fighting behind the scenes of the design specification committee who, after the success of the version one CompactFlash, were working on the excitingly named version two. The IBM MicroDrive couldn't be made thin enough so they fought to get the specification made to allow a thicker unit. They won.

SmartMedia is a little different, it is a similar size to CompactFlash but only as thick as a credit card. Its connection is through a large conductive area, in the same way as a mobile phone card.

Digital cameras are the biggest users of CompactFlash, the reason being relatively obvious however there are others: portable MP3 players (250Mb will give you about four hours of music); Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs); and there's even a digital music mixing/editing desk that outputs as MP3 to CompactFlash, that you could then plug into your MP3 player.

You might think that a very compact 250Mb (or more) might be useful for backing up data and for a write-once that might be true. However this type of chip media has a limited lifetime in terms of writing. The documentation will



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Version 2 now has Powerpoint export.

OHP2 is a screen-based presentation package for use with RISC OS computers

OHP2 lets you compile Presentations comprised of a number of graphics files, which you create or purchase outside OHP, and show them on your computer's VDU as a full-screen presentation. OHP has facilities to order the graphics, give them consistent styling, add sound effects and help you present them to an audience. If you have access to an electronic projector, you can use that to project the presentation onto a screen.

The read-only version, OHP_Show (which is Freeware) can be given away with your presentations or used on any number of computers; this makes OHP presentations an ideal way of communicating or advertising.

OLYMPUS Cameras

C860L	£290
C960Z	£390
C990Z	£490
C2020Z	£550
C2100UZ	£900
C3030Z	£800

C3030 Zoom 3.3Megapixel (2056x1528 pixels) 3xzoom 2.5 digital zoom, sound and movie feature, takes lens attachments, Manual as well as automatic controls, internal flash with provision for external flash. 16MB memory card and remote control standard. £800 inc.VAT and RISCOS software

NEW! C2100 Ultra Zoom 2.2 Megapixel (1600x1200 pixels) 10xzoom, movie feature, Sound, Electronic TTL SLR with image stabilisation Manual as well as automatic controls, internal flash with provision for external flash. 16MB memory card and remote control standard. A real photographer's camera at £900.00 inc.VAT and

C2020 Zoom 2.2 Megapixel (1600x1200 pixels) 3xzoom 2.5 digital zoom, movie feature, takes lens attachments, Manual as well as automatic controls, internal flash with provision for external flash. 8MB memory card and remote control standard. £550.00 inc.VAT and RISCOS software

C990 Zoom 2.2 Megapixel (1600x1200 pixels) 3xzoom 2x digital zoom, internal flash with 8MB memory card £490.00 inc.VAT and RISCOS software

C960 Zoom 1.3 Megapixel (1280x960pixels) 3xzoom 2x digital zoom, internal flash with 8MB memory card £390.00 inc.VAT and RISCOS software

C860L 1.3 Megapixel (1280x960pixels) 2x digital zoom, internal flash with 8MB memory card £290 inc.VAT and RISCOS software

NEW!

C2100 Ultra Zoom



Parallel port SmartMedia reader with any camera: add £70

PRINTERS

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PhotoReal Printer Software by PHOTODESK



PhotoReal for current printers £69.00 PhotoReal for discontinued printers £25

Hardware prices are constantly changing, please contact me for quotes on Cameras, Printers, Scanners and Graphics Tablets

Chris

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The CompactFlash reader in all its glory

tell you how many times it will take but then you have to bear in mind that, depending on the software you're using, a single save of data might actually result in multiple write operations to the same area of memory — so you can't be completely sure how many you've done. In addition the chip-based units are vulnerable to static shocks. It's not something you want to rely on.

The only problem with this consumer product up to now has been the fact that it has been unavailable to the RISC OS world, but Surftec have been working on the problem and we now have a solution in the form of *DigiFlash*. In regard to the different forms of media that can be plugged in Surftec say that *DigiFlash* works with all currently available ones but can't guarantee they will work with any future releases, though they will keep up-to-date and provide new software releases. In addition there's no promise as to whether the new releases will be free, basically it depends on how much work is involved.

What Surftec have got is a piece of software that allows a standard PC CompactFlash reader to be accessed from RISC OS. The unit you get plugs into the parallel port and there is a feed through for your printer, however there's no guarantee that any other parallel port-connected hardware will function correctly, it is suggested that if you do have a problem you can use a two-way parallel port switch box. Still it does mean that if you do have a PC you get two for the price of one as the PC software is also included although check out the panel to see what we say about the PC software.

Apart from the hardware and leads, there's a single floppy disc and a 16-page manual which covers everything you need to know quite clearly.

Hardware installation is not as simple as it might be, the card reader itself has to be powered and this is achieved using the keyboard socket. For the data you plug the card reader into the parallel port and then put your printer on the feed-through lead. Then you take the power lead, choose the right plug for your type of keyboard (AT or PS/2), and plug that into the keyboard socket and plug the keyboard into that feed-through socket. Finally you plug the power plug into the socket on the card reader's plug. It could get messy behind your computer.

Unsurprisingly, as we're dealing with RISC OS, the process of loading up *DigiFlash* is easy. The manual, perhaps to pad it out, gives you two options: Always loaded (install in Boot sequence) or load on demand (double-click to run). Naturally the manual goes into a bit more detail.

The other point (read the panel about the PC software) is that what Surftec provide is a Filer interface to the device. Nothing else. The manual provides a list of software that you might find useful with information you can put on and take off a CompactFlash, but *DigiFlash* itself does just one thing and does it very well.

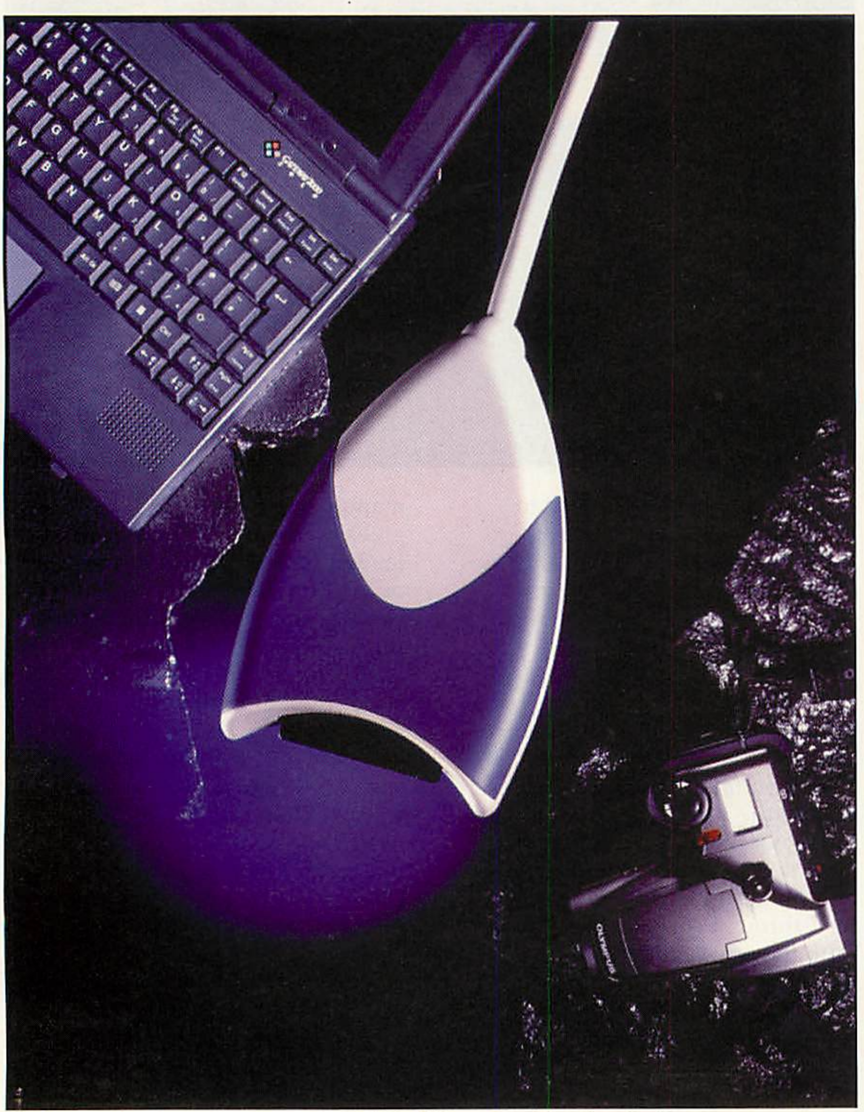
The problem with a review of this sort is that, now I've said that you get a Filer interface, I've said it all. RISC OS is standard and you get the standard interface and standard operations. The files of

data, which might not be JPEGs, can be renamed, moved, copied, altered and saved while on the media, or dragged out and dragged back in. It's easy.

Data stored on the CompactFlash is actually in a PC format and there are certain problems if you are using the standard Acorn DOSFS interface, the manual suggests that if you buy Win95FS from Warm Silence Software it will cure some of the problems you might encounter such as the name of the CompactFlash not being available.

And in case you may have been wondering, the IBM MicroDrive does work with the Surftec reader and Surftec will shortly be added to IBM's official list of compatible interfaces and operating systems.

Nice. END



...and this is the SmartMedia reader – can you tell the difference (apart from the colour)?

The PC software

It's horrid. Like RISC OS it's true that Windows does allow additional filing systems to be added but the configuration process is horrible and our first attempt wiped the CompactFlash. When it is working the window that pops up is a cross between a standard directory viewer and image-editing software. In other words, we were looking at the data as stored on the chip but any attempt to access it automatically invoked the (crippled) application.

You might have thought that at the very least you could take the JPEG files off the chip via the provided interface, but no. Try as I might there was no way I could figure out how to get the images off — the only possible solution was to buy the full version of the application off the Web.

Actually it wasn't the only solution, what you do is go into something like *Word*, use the Insert picture option, trace through the directory structure until you find the CompactFlash then load your pictures from there. Horrid.

Product details

Product:	DigiFlash
Price:	£39 (software only); £79 (with CompactFlash reader or SmartMedia reader [not available at time of going to press])
Supplier:	Surftec Ltd, Burma Cottage, Glen Road, Beacon Hill, Hindhead, Surrey GU26 6QE
Tel:	(+44/0)1428 608121
Fax:	(+44/0)1428 608123
E-mail:	support@surftec.net
Web:	www.surftec.net

Good Not

N*oticeboard Pro* is the successor to *Noticeboard*, a simple presentation application published several years ago (also by The Really Good Software Company), and represents a complete re-design, re-coding and major enhancement of the original.

Being published within approximately the same six months as the latest version of Photodesk's presentation heavyweight *OHP2*, both packages should make for an interesting comparison and would ideally complement each other in the marketplace rather than diminish the markets.

Noticeboard Pro is provided on two discs with a substantial paper manual. Personally, I prefer this format of manual and despite the advantages of smooth window movements and larger screen modes on the latest RISC OS machines, I find a paper manual usually more convenient.

Included with the package are the presentation editor, a freely distributable viewer, a tutorial and a converter to make original *Noticeboard* files compatible with the latest version. The tutorial is effective in allowing you to create a presentation quickly and demonstrating or revealing the main features of the editor at the same time. This is a point I would particularly like to highlight as this kind of instruction is not given with *OHP2* where, although the program has an easy interface, it's not too good to deluge the beginner with the full set of information from the outset.

Philosophy

NBPro's approach to presentation creation is based on slides of images created in other applications being imported and subsequently organised by the program for display. The slides must be organised into groups, a presentation being defined by one or more groups.

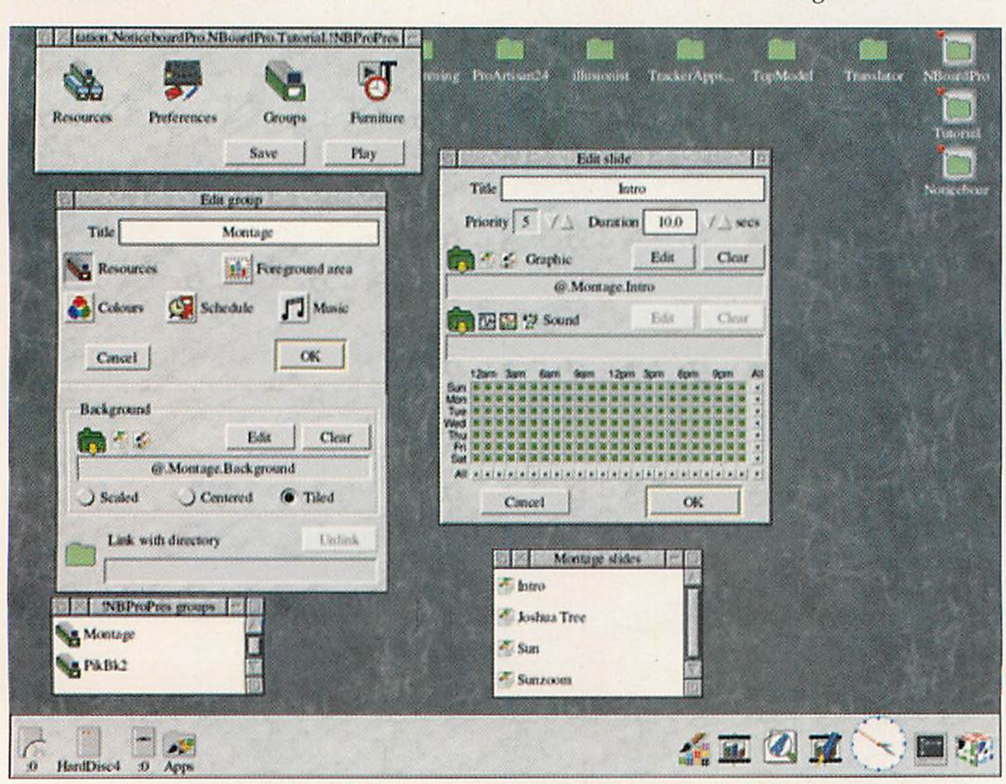
This would therefore appear to allow for more in-depth presentation as well as a more logical system for editing. Indeed, I found this helpful although the organisation of the presentation was slightly more difficult to appreciate at first compared to *OHP2*'s simple script window of slides.

This organisation allows the implementation of the various features at three levels: features can be added to individual slides, to groups of slides, or to a selection of groups (which may comprise the whole presentation).

Various features are also pertinent to the whole presentation such as the order in which the groups are presented and the features of the screen mode in which they are presented (colours and resolution for example).

A presentation can also be displayed in a window providing quick access to other desktop features. One would imagine this could be useful for demonstrating RISC OS-specific topics which would benefit from being presented within the RISC OS environment itself.

On choosing to create a presentation, a special application directory (into which the resources will be placed) is created or, if desired, a single file with references to their *pathnames*. The latter would saves disc space by avoiding duplicate copies of graphics and sounds resources but makes copying to another machine



The options available for displaying a presentation using the distributable viewer NboardPro

ices

Andrew Weston explores one of the two main contenders in the presentation arena

difficult. The creation process is facilitated by a central control window with icons enabling access to the essential editing capabilities of the software.

The location of the resources (if the application form of a presentation is desired) should be set first and the application directory of your nascent presentation is opened into which you can organise any graphics and sound files you wish to use for the slides, the backgrounds and accompanying music if necessary.

Of course the ability to create sound and music is generally speaking more involved than graphic preparation so for most users, I would expect audio resources made by a third party would be collected to accompany the graphics. The global choices mentioned above also should be set early in the creation process.

Creating and editing

The crucial process of ordering the slides and setting the way in which they are presented then begins. Group creation and editing is accessed through the control window providing a dedicated dialogue box for the group of slides. It is useful to be able to access and to control the features associated with a group in this way as opposed to opening menus and submenus to get to the attributes of the slides.

These include the background-graphic and audio for a group of slides. The sound is actually assumed to be a piece of music, say a CD track or Tracker file to be played with a set of slides or may play throughout the presentation. Music and sound are dragged and dropped into the dialogue box.

It is worthwhile to note that a large range of graphic image formats are supported by the software including RISC OS-native formats (Artworks, sprites and drawfiles) and formats compatible with other platforms. The ability to use JPEGs, waveform (WAV) files and MP3 files opens up an extremely wide source of resources from magazine CDs and from the Internet as well as providing the often important degree of compatibility with PC and perhaps Mac users.

Also, the Groups dialogue enables control of the window size, for presentations which do not use the full screen, and control of foreground and background colour. Background colour is important in the rendering of Artworks files as it determines the anti-aliasing palette and thus the quality of the display.

Foreground colour affects any text displayed by *NBPro* during the presentation such as titles, and owners of RISC OS 3.7 and above can use font-blending. It is pleasing to see the strengths of RISC OS exploited wherever possible in this way.

Once created, groups (if only by title at first) appear in a new window as a list and using a menu structure, one can create slides for those groups. This is sensibly done in a similar fashion through a dialogue box onto which the important graphic containing information for that slide is dragged together with an optional sound sample file to be played alongside the image. Again, a new window is opened showing the order of slides as they are created. Within the group- or slide-list window, re-ordering is simply a matter of dragging icons.

Full control is provided over the scheduling and duration of slides, whether they are displayed automatically or randomly for a period of time set by the user. Of particular note is a calendar-style control panel within the slide dialogue box which allows the user, if necessary, to determine the days and even hours in which a slide can or can't be shown.

For stand-alone displays this kind of precision would makes the package ideal for, say, producing advertisements targeted at a particular time when exposure of passers-by to the presentation is deemed to be at its optimal.

Accompanying the drop-in boxes for graphics and sound are buttons which can open the selected file into a default editor, if present. For example, a drawfile would open the file for editing in *Draw* whereas a

The main control panel, Group and Slide editing windows

sample could be opened in an editor such as Sonor (**www.tribbeck.com**) if the software is present. Thereby, on saving the edited file the resource is already updated for use by *NBPro* without any further adjustments made to its settings.

Presentation

After the slides are prepared and ordered to a satisfactory level, the user must then practice delivery and ultimately present the material to an audience so, clearly, the control and the process of slide-display by the program is all-important.

*NBP*ro permits a large variety of transition effects between slides (screen 'dissolves' or 'wipes' and so on.) which are chosen at random from a list although you can restrict and preview this range of effects. This is akin to the transition repertoire of *OHP2* although in *NBPro* the effect can be previewed on the full screen as opposed to a small pane but both fulfil their purpose. No consideration is made regarding the speed of transitions on the various Acorn machines in *NBPro* however and this could potentially restrict the transition effects available on slower machines.

As it is developed the presentation can be viewed with the editor or with the freely distributable viewing application *NboardPro*. The latter allows control over volume and enables all graphics and sound samples to be cached in memory to avoid potential delays through repeated disc-access.

The next slide can be drawn during the free time available while the current slide is being displayed. This feature is likely to be highly useful for owners of slower RISC OS machines especially when displaying large, high-resolution or complex graphics.

An optional control panel can be displayed during a presentation for advancing, reviewing or pausing slides. This provides adequate handling of the presentation but for those who wish to work in the absence of anything but the information being conveyed by the slides it is a hindrance that the only a simple progression to the next slide is permitted from the keyboard. *OHP2* on the other hand provides a range of keyboard and mouse controls which can navigate the slides without the need for panels on the screen.

One feature specific to *NBPro* however is the selection of so-called 'furniture' which can be displayed in parallel to the slides. In addition to the control panel already mentioned, one can choose the location of a clock, the slide title or the slide-group title. although seemingly an ancillary part of the presentation, these components may be regarded as essential by certain users of the software for their particular application. If not essential, an indication of the time or a slide title could be highly useful during rehearsals for a presentation.

Conclusions

With the presence of two major presentation packages in the market which are both undergoing active development, the key question is which one to buy and they are perhaps just out of the price range which would allow a serious user to invest in both.

It should be said that in both packages there are certain features absent which are incorporated into similar software on other platforms such as animation facilities for textual information. Although such aspects may be considered unnecessary, as parts of some perhaps more serious presentations, fancy effects may be all that is required to make the presentation stand-out and draw attention to itself — important for advertising a product or service at a show for example.

At present, although not usually too hard to achieve, the user of both *NBPro* and *OHP2* would need to make several similar slides as frames of an animation which quickly change to each other.

In comparing both packages, both are capable of making perfectly adequate presentations and even eye-catching or impressive ones. *NBPro* has a well-organised and very intuitive interface which after a little practice facilitates it's productivity to a large extent. It does lack in a few areas however and one feels that there is not the degree of control during a presentation that there is with *OHP2*.

I suspect that *OHP2* might be better suited towards educational presentations where time needs to be spent on each slide or reviewing other slides and the presence of a drawing tool and the ability to skip slides or hide for later possible display play an invaluable role in this area.

NBPro on the other hand is ideal for rolling presentations giving clear information and the advanced support for sound and music is also well-suited for this purpose. The paper manual accompanying *NBPro* makes numerous references to the use of other leading RISC OS software packages to assist in preparing slides. The major example is the ability to export Drawfiles from most Web browsers and DTP packages (*Fresco*, *Textease* and so on).

At a slightly cheaper price than *OHP2*, I would thoroughly recommend *NBPro* for most uses but highlight the possible better educational suitability of *OHP2*. This provides you with a clear choice and although both packages have areas for improvement, with both in development they complement each other in the marketplace. **END**

In the next issue of Acorn User *I'll be taking a more complete look at* OHP2.

Product details

Package:	Noticeboard Pro
Price:	£32 (single user); £96 (site licence)
Supplier:	The Really Good Software Company, 8, Hawthorn Close, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 1HN.
E-mail:	sales.rgsc@argonet.co.uk
Tel/Fax:	(+44/0) 1582 761 395

Free Ads

• A5000, AKF18 Monitor, 4Mb Mem, 41Mb & 162Mb HDD, External Cumana SCSI CD, B/W 400dpi Hand Scanner, Armadillo Sound Sampler, Canon BJ10 B/W portable printer 300x360 dpi, Sportster 14,400 external modem, all cables, Various games, CDs & applications. £500 o.n.o Tel Nathan: 020 8859 3444

• FOR SALE: StrongARM 233T and RISC OS 4.02 - just three months old, selling to upgrade to Kinetic. Just £250. Saves you £50 on buying new! Visitors welcome to come and see it all working. Leeds. Email **ms@michaelstubbs.net** or telephone 0113 246 5303.

• WANTED: 586 133Mhz PC Card with PC Pro software to run under RISC OS 4. Must be cheap - you can pick up a Windoze box of this spec for about £20! Email **ms@michaelstubbs.net** or telephone 0113 246 5303.

• Wanted:Irlam Videodesk,podule and software in working order. Edmund Gray, egray@argonet.co.uk, (01279)428913

• Acorn A4 portable. 4mb RAM 60mb HD Excellent condition only used lightly. includes spare battery, case 450UKP No offers sorry 0151 336 1506 0151 353 1151 (fax) 07833 916420 **frampev@eurobell.co.uk**

• Wanted ESP parallel port Midi interface must be in good working order call Ashley on 0151 3361506 07833 916 420 **frampev@eurobell.co.uk**

• 2 slot backplane, new from Castle Technology. Selling to upgrade to Second Slice. £30 or nearest offer. Email **ms@michaelstubbs.net** or call 0113 246 5303

• WANTED: Irlam Instruments i16 digital sound card or other similar product. Must be fully working. Also interested in Oregan audio sequencing/production software. Email **ms@michaelstubbs.net**

• Archimedes 440/1 4Mb RAM 40Mb HD, RISC OS 3.1, AKF12 monitor: £120. Acorn PCx86, DX4-100S card ACA56 complete, unwrapped £85. Tel: 0121 744 6069 Solihull, West Mids

• A3010 4Mb RISC OS 3 Acorn 14in colour monitor, Citizen colour printer, joystick, StartWrite, several games £50 the lot. Tel: 01487 822336 (evenings) Buyer collects, Cambs.

• Risc PC600, 25Mb, 420Mb HD, 486 card, 16-bit sound, AKF60, monitor, extensive software. Also Canon LaserDirect LBP8. Can split. Contact Andy 07799 767 257, **andy@dgraphix.demon.co.uk**. Offers around £400.

• A3010 4Mb(?) 14in Acorn colour monitor, two Star dot-matrix printers; manuals and software; workstation stand; KS2 software; buyer collects; Dudley; £150 ono; excellent condition.

• WANTED: manual for HP Desktop 500 inkjet mono printer. Pleae help! call Roger 017683 72062 Cumbria. Costs refunded.

• We have 5 fully functional BBC Master systems, plus various other odds and ends, all free to a good home. Rob Turner **turnerr@cheltladiescollege.org**

Acorn User Free Ads Service

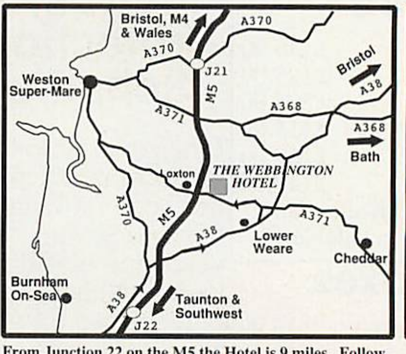
Why not take advantage of our free reader ad service? Fill in your details on this coupon (24 words maximum, one word per box below) and send it to Free Ads, Acorn User, 26 Stockport Village, Hooper Street, Stockport SK1 1DQ or by e-mail to: freeads@acornuser.com. Only one ad per reader please, private sales or wanted only.

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Please fill in your name and telephone number below – these will not be published but enable us to contact you in case of any queries. Make sure you include your own town/county in your ad to help potential buyers with their purchasing decision.

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How to get there by road



From Junction 22 on the M5 the Hotel is 9 miles. Follow the A38 to Bristol turning left at 'Lower Weare', just past 'The Lamb' public house where the Hotel is signposted.

Date: Saturday 10th February 2001

Venue: The Webbington Hotel
Loxton, North Somerset.

Time: 10am until 4.30pm

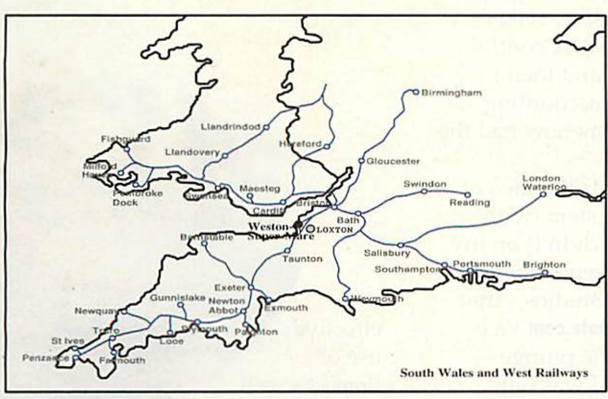
Cost: £2.50 adults
£1.50 ARM Club / Clan members

Children under 16 FREE
(accompanied by adult)

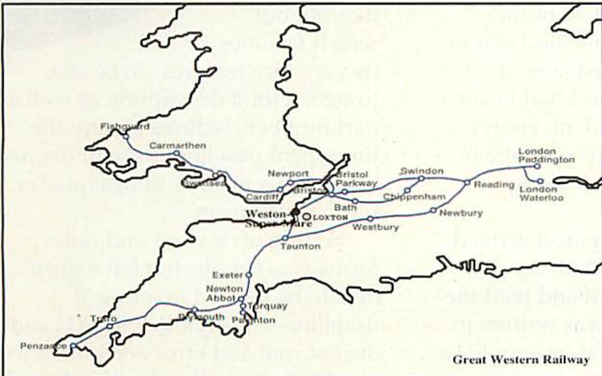
Refreshments available.

Contact: (01935) 413170
Hotel Tel: (01934) 750100

How to get there by train



South Wales and West Railways



Great Western Railway

The nearest train station to the 'Acorn Southwest Show' is Weston-Super-Mare.

A FREE bus shuttle service will be available outside the train station, in the bus layby, to take you to the show, then back to the train station, later in the day.

The first shuttle will leave Weston-Super-Mare train station at 9.30am and the last will leave the show at approx 5pm. The shuttle will operate frequently between these times.

RISC OS dis

What do you do when your Government decides that a limited company is not a *limited* company when it thinks that it can raise more taxes? Simple — find something else to do. So you're income goes down but then so does the Government's revenue — nice one.

I expect we've all got some dream project that we would much rather be doing than the "day job", and with the "encouragement" of our glorious leader I decided the time had come. Since my income was going to be clobbered anyway I decided that it was time take the leap into the world of new and recycled Land Rover spares. Being the owner of five Land Rovers of varying types, and having driven, used and abused them for about ten years I was finding it difficult to get used spares, and impossible to get off-the-shelf ones.

So the first thing was to find some premises. This was not so easy as you might suppose, people are a bit funny about car spares places, perhaps with some justification from the past activities of the traditional scrap yard. The first unit I found fell through at the last moment, which I found very disappointing at the time. However, a few weeks later I found another, much bigger, and moved in.

The other advantage of the cancellation of the first unit was that by now it had become apparent that I would also need to sell new spares, and the original location near Stoke-on-Trent would have caused problems with suppliers, as they have other customers in the area — what a disaster that would have been.

I knew right from the start, having been a customer of other places for some years, that stock control was going to be a vital issue in the smooth running of the business. I talked to many people about stock and accounting systems, and it looked as though setting up was going to be expensive: £600 would only buy me a stock control and invoicing system, and then I would have to buy an accounting system as well, and somehow nail the two together.

I was edging towards the idea of developing my own system (with hindsight thank God I didn't) on my trusty Risc PC when I remembered *Prophet* from Apricote Studios. After looking at the **www.apricote.com** Web site I decided to take the plunge — even if it was no good I was only going to waste £200. Most of the freelance work I've done has been in the real-time/embedded area of software engineering so I had never (apart from Pegasus at University) played with an accounts package in anger — and I was not looking forward to it.

Very promptly the parcel arrived and, in an unusual bout of sensibleness, I sat down and read the entire manual. And it was written in English! Where financial terminology is used it is explained in simple terms that even I could understand. Even the advice, both in the manual and on their Web page, was clear, concise and, best of all, free!

After two or three days getting my head round what my company systems were going to be I took the plunge and installed the software and configured the various accounts, suppliers, invoices and so on. It all went very well, with most of the hiccups down to me.

Trying to decide what to stock was the next problem. Fortunately my main supplier provided a "top ten" of parts, and together with my own experiences and some research into the my likely customers I made my first order. This took about a week to type into *Prophet* and involved defining a set of loose rules concerning part descriptions. This was necessary so I could make effective use of *Prophet*'s well thought out search facilities, one of its very nice features. To be able to search for a description as well as part numbers reduces greatly the time spent trawling through the parts books, thus making things quicker for the customers.

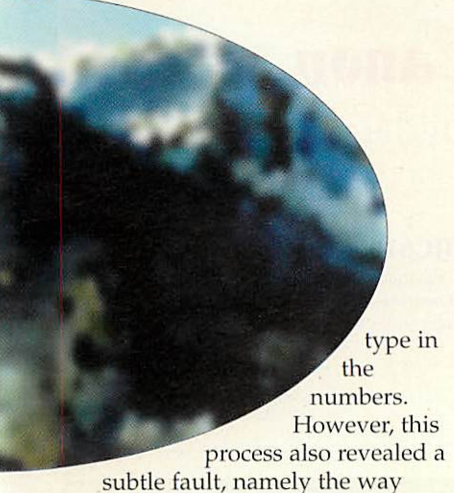
Setting up invoice and order forms was simple, but left a great deal to be desired in terms of usability — it's not WYSIWYG and a deal of trial and error is required to get things right, but the templates do help in ensuring that the correct information is present on the forms. One huge hole in the software is the lack of ordinary counter receipts.

Usually you just issue a receipt with a sale and everything gets accounted for in the day book at the end of each day. Though *Prophet* undoubtedly does the necessary in terms of updating the day book there is no way of generating a presentable receipt so every transaction has to be done using an invoice. This soon leads to huge amounts of "paper work" in the system.

However a very useful feature is the ability to drag and drop all fields in the various windows. When checking an order to get the stock locations it's very much simpler just dragging part numbers to the stock "find" dialogue box and clicking on "find first" than it would to have

covery

Getting into business with RISC OS



type in the numbers. However, this process also revealed a subtle fault, namely the way *Prophet* deals with undelivered items. The only way to do this is to delete the undelivered item from the original order (it's only temporary deletion, the stored copy does not change) and then click on "Update Stock". Unfortunately *Prophet* gets it wrong and the quantity fields get out of sync with the part numbers — luckily I spotted this early on before too much damage had been done.

Populating an invoice is also a drag and drop operation, just drag the part number to the invoice and all the rest get filled in by the software. There is another little problem here that caused some extra work, if an item is included in the invoice that does not have a part number, such as an overall price for filling an axle with oil, the invoice is correct but the sales ledger gets updated with two entries — one for the stock items and one for the unnumbered items.

This would not be a problem if all the VAT was not put on the first entry. It's not a show stopper but is irritating. There is however one failing that is very nearly a show stopper — you cannot print directly to the printer without frequent crashes. Though it's only the actual printing that stops and nothing get upset in the books, it is very irritating, and very time consuming, having to print via a file every time.

The only real disaster to date has not been the fault of either the hardware or the software. A mouse (a real, living, breathing mouse) had got into the computer via the hole left when a network had been removed and had, er, relieved itself over couple of IC's. Thanks to Paul at Desktop Projects sorting out a new motherboard very quickly the show was soon back on the road, and *Prophet* very sensibly reported that all was not well (the machine actually staggered on for quite a while before finally refusing to boot) and recommended reverting to a backup.

Though I was only without the machine for five days I quickly realised just how dependent on it I am. I had two orders arrive and could not be sure I was putting them in the correct locations, but even worse was a customer asking for a part and me not being sure if they were a stock item, had I got any and where on earth they were — I could not even generate an order.

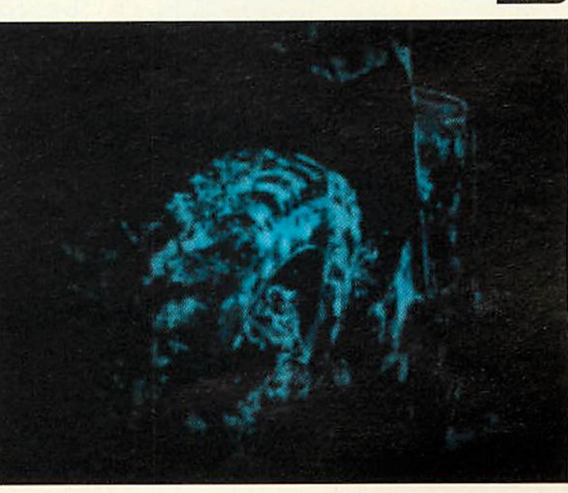
After this problem it took a few days to check that the stock database was not corrupted, and more time was spent on checking that the sales and purchase ledgers were correct. Both had in fact, before the backup was used, been quite badly damaged. Thus one crash had cost me a lot of time and effort. I also work as a freelance software engineer and I know that without spending a lot of money I would be nowhere near as secure as I am with RISC OS and *Prophet*.

So would I recommend *Prophet* for a business? In principle it's a definite "Yes", but there is a catch. I contacted the authors regarding the printing bug and the receipt generation and the reply was that no further work would be done on *Prophet* until the PC version was complete.

If those two major problems were fixed I would be able to recommend *Prophet* to anyone for business use, but until they are fixed you would have to be a bit of an enthusiast to live with them. I've got 4780 stock items in it at the moment and it seems to cope well with the load. If the authors could be persuaded to sort the bugs out, and perhaps add a facility to scan manual pages in and link them to part numbers there could be a good market there.

Most garage systems currently are Unix-based with text-only screens. The users do not care what OS is being used, they just need it to be stable and allow them to find bits quickly. If you get the chance, pop into your local Land Rover dealer and get a price for some part, preferably one that's a little obscure. They will be using a Windows-based system which clearly demonstrates how not do it. You can't load data from other suppliers, and you can't change prices to allow you to make a deal, the user interface is clumsy and it's slow. So, will I be sticking with *Prophet*? Well, yes.

END



The Internet experience

Richard Roberts gets to grips with the differences between his old world and the new RISC OS one

It was bound to happen sooner or later, the time was going to come when I would want to use e-mail, browse the Web and download programs without having to walk 25 minutes to the university computer room.

I'd heard lots of horror stories about ISP's not supporting RISC OS and difficulties connecting to services. There is one ISP that supports the platform, Argonet, but being a student I was going to have to try one of the free services before resorting to paying for anything.

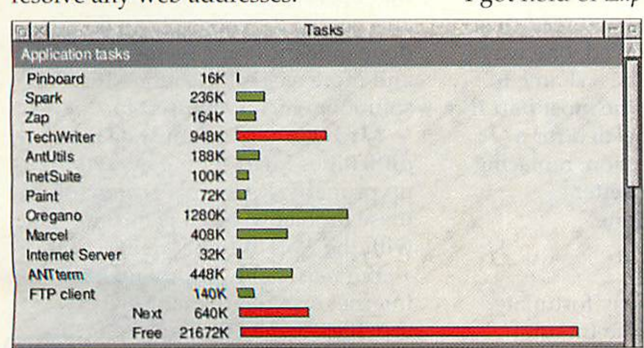
I just happened to have a Freeserve CD lying around, of course this is useless for my Risc PC, but the sleeve did give a URL for manual sign-up. So I trudged off for the last time to the computing service building and sign up. That done, I returned home.

Setting it up

To be brutally honest this was a complete nightmare from start to finish, everything that could have gone wrong did.

There was already a copy of the ANT Internet Suite installed on the machine, complete with news articles from The back end of 1998, which made interesting reading. My first step was to delete all of the previous owners mailboxes and ISP settings.

Next to do was write a script file for connecting to Freeserve, I had all the information I needed in front of me, so it should have been easy, or so I thought. I got a connection of sorts, but e-mail was erratic and it couldn't resolve any web addresses.



You can lose a lot of memory using the Internet

Fortunately, I was able to use ANTTerm to access the university servers, and so use *Lynx*. And for those who complain about RISC OS Web browsers, just try *Lynx* and then see what you think then.

Lynx allowed me to access Paul Vigays' site, who had been patiently giving me advice and instructions throughout the process. And there it was, a Lynx-friendly entrance to the site, the only one I've ever seen. A proper Freeserve dial-up script was soon downloaded to the server and transferred to my machine using FTP. To cut a long story short I eventually got it set up and working but only with a lot of help from many people.

The modem was easy to set up though. I bought the cheapest, unheard-of brand I could find and just plugged it in. No messing around with drivers and installing software that Windows requires. I just plugged it in and it worked.

E-mail and news

Marcel, the built-in mail and news client for the ANT Suite handles both mail and news very well. A few tweaks in "Choices..." and I have it working exactly the way I like. I found that using *Edit* for writing messages could result in some strange formatting unless I changed its options every time I composed a message. This was rather tedious, so I got hold of *Zap* and its special e-mail mode, and this combination works much better and without any problems. I also find the colouring of quoted text that *Zap* provides very clear and it makes things easier to follow when a message contains more than one quote. The main features that are lacking in my opinion are that I can't put graphics and suchlike in the messages without creating an attached HTML file. Personally I don't mind this, it wasn't something I ever did on my Windows machine but I can see why it would put some people off.

I do appreciate being able to compose a message without having to wait for a huge word processor such as *Word* fire-up first. A good text editor is all that is needed for the things I do.

Web browsing

This is where the real test comes. It is a fact that RISC OS-based Web browsers do not have the same functionality and features as those on most other platforms. But this isn't to say that they are unusable, not by any means. I have to say though that with *Windows*, neither *Netscape* nor *Internet Explorer* ever let me down.

To begin with I used *Fresco* as it was supplied with the ANT Suite. While it was great for looking at most sites, I found it couldn't cope with most online banking and shopping sites. Mainly I couldn't even enter them due to the lack of SSL. I tried again after installing the SSL module from Argonet. I could now enter the sites, but *Fresco*'s JavaScript is not up to scratch, and resulted in lots of "No data could be fetched from this URL" errors.

Specifically, I couldn't access my bank account online, nor could I buy train tickets, or access Web based e-mail. I buy a lot of train tickets and I always buy them online as using the phone wastes half an hour and the local station is unstaffed. Besides, there is the pound discount, that nearly pays for a pint you know!

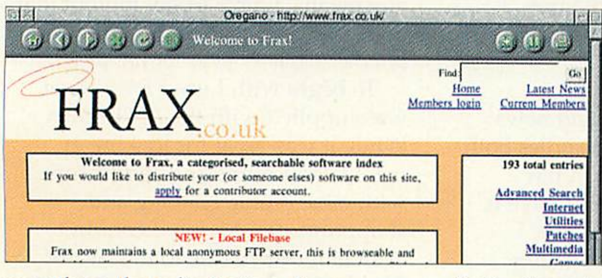
By now *Oregano* had been available for some time, and the general opinion seemed to be that it

handled JavaScript more reliably and was more stable than Fresco. This coupled with the fact that it is in active development compared to *Fresco* being dormant for the foreseeable future made me decide to give it a try.

I installed *Oregano*, downloaded the update necessary to have the full version and then found the download had got corrupted somehow. It was frustrating that the upgrade server wouldn't let me try again, but Castle were very prompt about resetting it for me and I had no more problems after that.

How does it compare to *Fresco* and to the Windows-based browsers? Well, it knocks spots off *Fresco* that's for sure. I handles HSBC online banking perfectly, as well as train ticket purchases and Web-based e-mail. It does tend to use a lot more RAM than *Fresco*, but it's never caused any problems for me. I wouldn't say it's faster than *Fresco* at rendering, and the lack of a cache is definitely a serious omission.

Printing is another area which needs some attention as the colours seem to be somewhat inaccurate. Given the origins of *Oregano*, I can see where these limitations have come from, and I don't mind that much as Castle have said that a new release is on the way soon which will include a cache.



Compared to *Internet Explorer* and *Netscape*, apart from the problems mentioned above, *Oregano* seems to be about equal. I don't have a Java plug-in, but *RiscCafe* is so out of date that it isn't likely to be of much use. This is the one thing that could be a serious problem in the future. Web sites are beginning to use Java more and more, and it would be a shame for an otherwise excellent browser to be crippled by this. I realise that a Java plug-in is separate from any browser in the RISC OS market so this criticism can be applied equally to *Fresco*. I do feel that these things are coming, we just need to be patient. In the meantime, lack of Java hasn't stopped me doing anything I wanted to.

I can't really make a speed comparison here, as last year I was using a LAN connection with *Explorer*, and everything was downloaded and rendered in about half a second!

Newsgroups can have useful stuff on them

Other tools

The rest of the Internet tools I possess have little functional difference to their Windows counterparts. *ANTTerm* is a good terminal emulator that works well, and the graphical FTP client is probably the best I've ever used.

Paul Vigays' *ANTUtils* is a useful addition to the Internet Suite, and adds many useful features to the whole Suite. The ability to do an automatic dial-up and mail fetches was something that I did miss, and this alone makes it worth a tenner.

As I write, Argonet have just announced the cessation of support for the ANT Suite, though it looks likely that another organisation may be set up to continue support. There is even a faint glimmer of hope that further development of the software may take place. By the time you read this, all will have been resolved, one way or the other. It would be a shame to see the Suite die – for the most part it provides everything needed for a proper Internet connection, replacing *Fresco* with one of the better alternatives is easily done.

Conclusions

Perhaps I am particularly fortunate, but I have found that the Internet software available for RISC OS allows me to do everything I want to do. Aside from the initial setting up, it is less complex than the Windows equivalents, particularly *Marcel*. *Outlook* has so many options and settings that it is really a little too complex for my liking. And as with everything Microsoft these days, it tries to be a miniature Web browser as well which only increases complexity and frustration and decreases reliability.

I do like the method for attaching files to a Marcel message. So much more elegant than clicking on an "Attach" button and working with another window. Nothing is simpler than just dragging the files onto the compose message window. It beats *Execmail* (a less common e-mail client I used extensively) and *Outlook* hands down.

I can't say that the Web browsing software available for this platform has as large a feature list as that for Windows. But the features that are missing haven't caused me any problems since I bought a browser that is in active development.

It reminds me of using BeOS and the Internet software available for that operating system, simple to use and geared towards getting things done quickly. It just seems cleaner and more elegant than the Microsoft solution which I am used to.

My biggest gripe must be the difficulties I had setting everything up properly. R-Comp's *Dialup* solves these problems, but it is incompatible with the ANT Internet Suite.

I'm reasonably happy with the Internet experience that RISC OS provides, and as time goes on things can only get better. END

Coming soon....

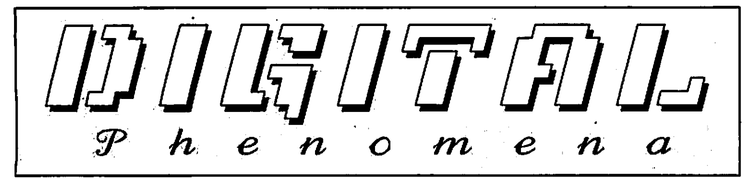
...a major new RISC OS application

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Home imp

Steve Turnbull provides a versatile solution to some RISC OS problems

As I suggested in my editorial last issue there are some things that could be improved in the area of the RISC OS Filer to bring it into line with other operating systems without requiring massive re-writes — although cooperation is needed by developers.

Cooperation is something that I hope we don't have too much of a problem with in our market — in-fighting is potentially lethal.

There are a few difficulties with the filing system and a few things other operating systems can do, that we can't:

- Limited filetypes
- No individual icons
- File preview
- File embedding
- Other useful features

And these can all be solved/added by more general use of drawfiles.

As was mentioned by John Cartmell in the Christmas 2000 issue, the drawfile has done more to unify the applications in RISC OS than any other file format. A generalised graphic filetype that can be used to describe most graphics you can get in a window. Hence most major applications provide a way to save their own format as drawfiles which can then be loaded into other programs as a graphic.

But one clever company went a stage further than that but before we get to them let's take a quick look at the structure of the drawfile. The first 40 bytes compose the file header as shown in the first panel.

Now what Dalriada, the company in question, did with *Tablemate* was to make the internal structure of a saved file identical to a drawfile, with the image of the file included as standard drawfile objects, plus a special object which contained the data needed by *Tablemate* itself to allow the file to be edited. The filetype was, however, given a proper *Tablemate* filetype so that double-clicking it loaded it up into the correct program.

This meant that programs such as *Impression* and *Easiwriter* could simply load these files and render them automatically as if they were simple drawfiles (they looked at the file header rather than the filetype).

Yet using the OLE (object linking and embedding) meant that the displayed images could be loaded back into the creation program and edited and brought straight back into the DTP/WP program.

Nice.

Where to go?

The most important thing is to ensure that, whatever we do, we don't break anything that already works. Now it might seem that the obvious solution at this point is to get all application writers to do the same thing — if they have a displayable output record the information as a drawfile (under their own filetype) and keep the application-specific data in there as well, hidden inside a unique object.

But there's a slightly different approach that not only provides this clever facility but also solves other problems: Specify a single standard RISC OS filetype that we will call DrawData and inside this we invent a new drawfile object, preferably the first one to appear, the DrawData object which is shown in the panel on the opposite page.

The rest of the object uses a tagging system, every item in it has a unique identifying tag number and a length which means that a program that is scanning it can quickly move through the file for ones it recognises or can use.

We use tagged fields because it generally avoids the version problem, earlier programs ignore tags they don't recognise.

The filetype provides an extension of the existing filetype system with over four billion choices so that should be plenty and the existing system, though not able to cope directly, could initially be patched (legally) to handle it. So

Draw file headers

Size	Description
4	'Draw'
4	Major version number
4	Minor version number
12	Identity of application that created the file (padded with spaces)
16	Overall size (bounding box) of the image in "draw units", given by the corner coordinates

This is followed by zero or more objects, each object has an object type number (4 bytes) and a size (4 bytes) it may have a bounding box if it's an object to be rendered as part of the image.

rovements

DrawData Object

Size	Meaning
4	Object type, DrawData, &00000100
4	Object size in bytes (multiples of 4)
4	Flags (unused flags set to 0)
4	Filetype (&000 to &FFF same as RISC OS)
4	App name tag (1)
4	App name length (multiple of 4)
n	Full name of application that created this file padded with zeroes
4	No app message tag (2)
4	No app message length (multiple of 4)
n	Message to return if application not found when trying to run or load, padded with zeroes
4	Help message tag (3)
4	Help message length (multiple of 4)
n	Help message, padded with zeroes

The first two items are the standard header, there is a set of flags covered in the article and the true filetype.

when a DrawData file is double-clicked this filetype is intercepted by a separate program that looks at the real filetype and then performs the action required — perhaps launching the correct application to load this file. Any program currently running will first be asked to check whether the double-clicked file belongs to it. If it accepts DrawData files it can quickly check the file contents to see if it owns that file and load it if it does.

What happens if the application cannot be found? Well normally RISC OS provides that general and unhelpful response *An application that loads a file of this type has not been found by the Filer. Open a directory display containing the required application and try again.*

The reason this is a completely hopeless message is that *how do you know which is the required application?* Using the App name field we can solve this problem, a different message can be used: *This file requires 'xxxxxx xxxxx' which has not been found by the Filer. Open a directory display containing the required application and try again.*

But, if you've been paying attention and looked at that tagged list above, we could even provide a specific message to be returned if the file cannot be loaded. Much more useful.

I've also included a Help item, so that if someone is using the interactive help a message can be displayed that's specific to the file rather than a general directory message we get at the moment.

Looking good

Up to now we've only really solved one problem and provided some minor cosmetic improvements. So let's move on to something meatier. Mac OS for one allows any file object to be given any icon and both Mac OS and Windows allow file previewing — you can see what's in the file before you load it.

We can do that. For a start we are assuming that the file has a general structure of a drawfile, contains a displayable drawfile representation of the saved file and so can be loaded into anything that will display a drawfile.

So we have file preview, a little program can be used to display the file contents — it would be nice to tie this directly into the Filer so that whatever is currently selected is the item that is previewed but we may have to wait on that.

Then we have the icon changing option, all we need to do is have the creating program automatically include a small sprite (less than 500 bytes) to be displayed which can be a rendering of the image, or something else completely — if it's missing the standard icon for this filetype would be used.

Wheel reinvention

To be able to do all this would require each application programmer to write a whole section of code to manipulate the DrawData format. This is inefficient, so what is actually required is one module to be written that will handle the addition of the DrawData object and the tagged fields.

Plus, for now, we would need another module to hook into the Filer and provide the extra facilities that this idea provides. Of course it is only an idea, no one has done it beyond using the drawfile structure to hold a representation of the file plus the file data. But the fact that it's been done that far shows that this is a viable option — as an experiment it would be reasonable to take a *Tablemate* file and make the necessary modifications to the structure to show the system working.

So here's to a long and prosperous RISC OS future. END

Let's do it

This may be a nice idea but it's worthless unless implemented. If you are interested in helping to develop it into a workable solution contact me at:

develop@acornuser.com

Getting connected

Martin Hodgson explains how to get your machine running on the Internet

Setting up your RISC OS machine to send and receive e-mail, read the discussions on newsgroups and to browse the Web is (relatively) cheap and should be simple to set-up. But, unless you already know what you're doing, it never is.

The software, both free and commercial is excellent, the included instructions for set-up are usually well-presented but are written by the programmers. Where programmers do write an idiot's guide it is too brief and still assumes too much about the user (his understanding of the jargon) and his machine (what other software is on it and how it is set up).

Some people have published guides which pull it all together and get you started. Some of them are aimed at converting you from an existing system. All seem to describe things as they are supposed to work (but in important respects do not). In my experience they all seem to omit essential items.

Having recently been through all this, I felt that it was about time somebody did a fully detailed guide. I am just a normal user: not a software writer; I don't run networks; don't make my living out of computers am not overly thick-headed or ignorant in general.

If your machine is an up-to-date Risc PC (or other RISC OS 4 system), with the structured Boot application, you can skip the Getting Ready section, apart perhaps for the final paragraph. Check out *Bits of software*, though all the bits you need should be there, but you must read *Configuration* and *Setting up Socketeer*.

Getting ready

Firstly we assume you have a stand-alone RISC OS computer, not on a school or business network. At switch-on a banner will appear on screen telling you what version of RISC OS you have. If the version is 3.6 or later than you should have the "New Boot Structure" and therefore some essential software already installed. When you click the mouse on the hard disc icon and the root directory opens you will see the *!Boot* application there.

Versions of RISC OS older than 3.6 (on pre-Risc PC and early Risc PC machines) do not have this Boot structure automatically. You must get it. It was published on magazine discs when it was new in 1998. It is on the *Acorn User* 200 CD (November 1998) and AUCD 8 (February 2000, in the directory BOOT).

You might find it on the Internet (try **www.riscos.org** for links) if you have Internet access through other systems. Alternatively try the Public Domain library APDL. If you purchase *Oregano*, the Web Browser from Castle Technology Ltd you get the new Boot, and just about all the other software you need for this exercise. Installation is simple and full instructions come with it. Be aware that some of the software modules in the AUCD 200 version of *!Boot* will need to be updated. More on that later. The basic essential software for Internet connection is a *Dialler*, which connects you to the outside world, and a *Browser* for visiting Web sites, with these two you can do everything else. There are several RISC OS diallers, but the general public domain (free) favourite seems to be *Socketeer* though R-Comp's *DialUp* has made a good impression.

Available browsers include *WebsterXL* from R-Comp at only £25, while *Oregano* from Castle Technology is £57 (plus you get all the extras including the new Boot structure). Acorn's *Browse* is still usable but development has ceased. A free Browser is *ArcWeb*, but I had difficulty getting it to connect to anything at all.

You have to decide who your ISP (Internet Service Provider) is going to be — you can't get connected without one. There are quite a few free ones available such as Freeserve and BTClickFree, *Socketeer* comes with configurations for these two already installed. Whichever you choose get hold of the CD for the company — PC magazine CDs are handy for any and all of them.

Configuration

On the ISP CD you will need to find files called OFFL/INS and SIGNUP/ISP, these contain configuration information, unfortunately not in a format that RISC OS in general uses (although R-Comp's *DialUp* can).

These files are often in a directory called IE4 (standing for *Internet Explorer 4*) or you can use the Filer's Find function if they are not obvious. Copy these over to your hard disc

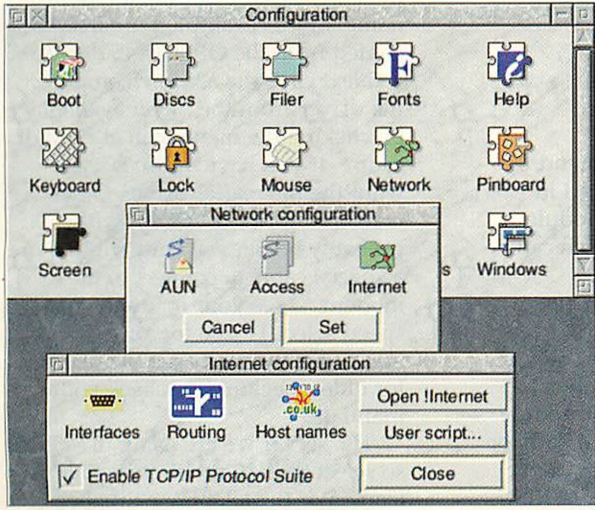


Figure 1: Gettin g started on the configuration of the Internet settings

Figure Ia: More detail on the Configuration of the Internet settings

for reference. The files need to be loaded into *Edit* (or *Zap* or *StrongEd*), hold down Shift and double-click the file icon to do load it up. You'll see that it is actually a readable file, you'll be needing some of this information later. Being PC-based every line is terminated with a newline and a "carriage return" (shown as [0d] in *Edit*) — *Zap* and *StrongEd* don't show the extra characters — if you use *Edit* delete them using Find/Replace 'magic characters'.

Now to configure your machine: Double-click on *!Boot* in the root directory of your hard disc drive. This opens the Configuration window (Figure I) — RISC OS 4 is shown but the same applies for earlier versions of Configure — click on *Network* and then *Internet* to open the Internet configuration window.

Click on the button next to 'Enable TCP/IP Protocol Suite' so that it is ticked. Click on *Interfaces* and tick the *PPP* button, then click on the *Configure...* button.

In the window that opens (Serial: PPP), enter *localhost* into the IP address slot. In the Remote address enter the first DNS_Address as shown in the OFFL/INS file for your Internet Service Provider. This is a sequence of four numbers, separated by full stops. In the Netmask slot enter 255.255.255.0 as shown in Figure I. Click to select Manually, under 'Obtain IP address'. Click on Set, then on Close to close those two windows.

Now click to open the Host names window. Enter *localhost* for the Host name, and your ISP's Domain name from their OFFL/INS file. Click the 'Use name servers also' button to select it. Click Set to close the window. Click Close to close the previous window.

While we are here, just click on the AUN and Access icons to confirm that the Enable buttons in there are not ticked in either, then click Set to save all the details and close the main Configuration window.

It seems that much of the text information you have just typed in will be overwritten by Socketeer when it is run but make sure all the buttons are ticked as required.

Bits of software

Socketeer needs some reasonably up-to-date software modules to be present in *System*. So open the *!Boot* directory by pressing Shift while double-clicking it; double-click on *Resources*, Shift+double-click *!System* then open *310* and *Modules*. In there should be a directory called Toolbox, containing several software module files. You can easily see what versions you have by Shift+double-clicking each module to load them into your normal editor. The window that opens is full of gobbledygook, but at the top, in the first five lines or so is some text. This text gives the name, version, and date of that module. *Socketeer* will demand the following versions (or later) :

```
Iconbar     1.18
Menu        0.33
ProgInfo    0.14
Window1.59
```

Socketeer will also demand the *SerialDev* application placed in *!Boot.Resources*, and the module *SerialBuff* 1.01 or later which can be put inside *!Boot.Resources. System.Modules*. These can be got from the Internet or APDL, or various compilation discs and CDs.

The Acorn / ANT Resolver module, and Acorn's PPP module are essential, but should already be in *!Boot.Resources.!System. Modules.310.Network*. On pre-RISC OS 3.7 you will also need the *CallASWI* module in the directory *!System.Modules*.

A small application called *SysLog* should also be obtained and placed in *!Boot.Resources*. This deals with error logging and can give useful information when things go wrong later.

Setting up Socketeer

Create a directory in the root directory of your hard disc and name it Internet. Place *Socketeer* and your browser in there.

Now you need the details of the ISP (Internet Service Provider) you are using. If you do not already have an account, use the SIGNUP/ISP details. Armed with this information you can now configure *Socketeer*.

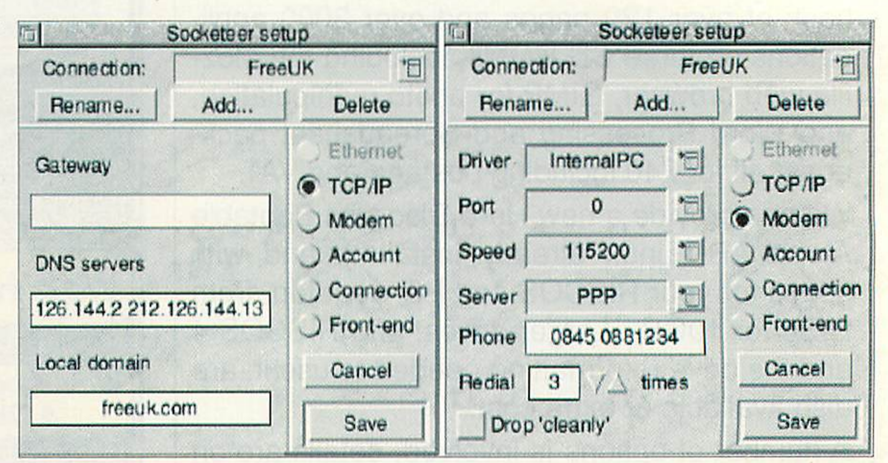
Load *Socketeer* to the iconbar. Menu click on the icon bar icon and select Setup —> Connection. This gives you the Socketeer Setup window as in Figure II. Click on Add... In the small window which opens, type in a short name to identify your ISP and click Add to close it. Ensure the name is showing in the Connection slot at the top of the Setup window.

Click the TCP/IP button: Leave the Gateway entry blank (we are a stand-alone machine, with direct access). Click in the *DNS servers* writable slot (icon) and type in the DNS_Address and the DNS_Alt_Address numbers given by the ISP, leave a space (no full stop or comma) between the two addresses. In *Local domain* enter the ISP domain name. In this example I use **freeuk.com** copied from the OFFL/INS details.

Next click the *Modem* icon. Select the driver from the menu available by clicking the menu icon at right of centre. If you have a Risc PC you want the *InternalPC* driver. Older machines (prior to A5000) will probably be *Internal* (and will require a special cable to connect to the modem — see your manual). For speed select 115200 for a Risc PC. You probably need a slower speed for older machines — check your manual.

The server we are using uses PPP, so select that. In the *Phone number* icon enter the telephone number, including the area code, for the ISP.

Getting Socketeer set up for FreeUK



Note the number may be different according to whether you are going to sign-up, or already have an account. Look at the relevant file for details.

Next click the *Account*: If you already have an account, type in your log-in name, and the password. Select the Save to File button. If you do not already have an account, enter in the name and password shown in the SIGNUP/ISP file, and don't Save to File.

Finally click on *Save* to save the configuration. This will be saved in the directory !Boot.Choices.Socketeer.Profiles, and is a text file. View it in *Edit* if you feel the need to check your settings directly.

PPP and secrets

There is a complication with some ISPs, Freeserve being one. What follows is gleaned from others (notably Matthew Somerville's Web page) which is full of advice and links for Internet people.

You need to open the directory !Boot.Resources.!Internet.files and in there make a new directory and name it PPP.

Into this place the following text files, taking Freeserve for example, created in *Edit*:

• CHAPSecret containing one line of the form

`YourUserName.freeserve.co.uk * YourPassword`

• PAPSecrets containing the same line as above.

'YourUserName' and 'YourPassword' should be replaced by the name and password you do use, in both files.

Then, click Menu over your text editor's iconbar icon and select Create —> Obey, in order to create two Obey files:

ip-up containing the line

`Set PPP$Connected Yes`

ip-down containing the line

`Unset PPP$Connected`

And that is that, done and dusted.

The connection

Reset your machine to ensure everything has booted up in the new configuration. Connect your modem with the appropriate computer to modem cable (PC or Acorn style depending on your computer). Plug the modem into a telephone socket and switch on.

Double-click on *Socketeer* to load it. Click on the iconbar icon to open the connection panel. Make sure the name of your ISP is shown in the bottom left corner of the panel, and click on *Connect*. The modem will initialise and dial your ISP. Load your Browser and type in the URL (the Internet address) that you want to go to — your ISP's home page URL should be in the OFFL/INS file.

If you don't have an account with the ISP yet, go to the URL given in the SIGNUP/ISP file, and get signed on.

Make a careful note of the User Name and Password you use, including the case, upper or lower. You will need to return to Setup —> Connection and edit your set-up in *Socketeer* to include the new information, and save it.

And that is that. You are free to explore the World Wide Web. Subscribing to News groups, and sending and receiving e-mail requires more software, all of it free if you wish, but which has to be set up. Now that you are connected all that software is readily available to you. More on that another time.

A few thoughts

• I have kept to totally free software (other than the Browser) for this exercise. However, for not a lot of cash (£20 actually, and you can get the browser *WebsterXL* in a deal with it) R-Comp have recently launched an application called *DialUp*. This sets itself up. You simply drop an OFFL/INS file onto a configuration window and everything is set. It comes with some of the free software needed for news and e-mail included.

You do still need the proper *!Boot* structure with all the bits and pieces in it. The difference is that in the configuration step above, *Enable TCP/IP* must be left un-ticked.

• Any Browser should work with no Setup required. If it does fail to connect, make sure it is not configured to use a Proxy.

• Nothing is more frustrating than to have a system which does nothing at all when you try to access the outside world.

You can check that the computer and modem are communicating by loading a simple Terminal emulator. Load *Socketeer* and load the Terminal emulator (any type — VT100, VT52, Viewdata, ANSI or whatever).

Click on the Terminal icon to open up a terminal window, switch on the modem (disconnected from the phone line), and type AT followed by pressing RETURN.

The modem should respond with OK on your screen. If you type ATD and RETURN the modem will try to dial out, it's 'Off Hook' light will illuminate, the call will fail, and the modem reports NO CARRIER.

Suitable terminal programs should be available on the Web, probably in some kind of 'History' section of sites such as Hensa and Stuttgart University (links from **www.riscos.org**). I have three, *TaskANSI*, *TaskData*, *Tansi_sm*, all from David Pilling's RISC OS Terminals disc (dated 1990).

These all work in the Desktop and simply open up a nice old fashioned black window with a blinking cursor, awaiting your input.

Good luck



Trial by usabi

What was it I said last month? Consistent where it counts, flexible metaphor, Fitts adherent? That's UltraGUI in a nutshell. We know what it takes to adhere to Fitts's law — have hard to miss targets.

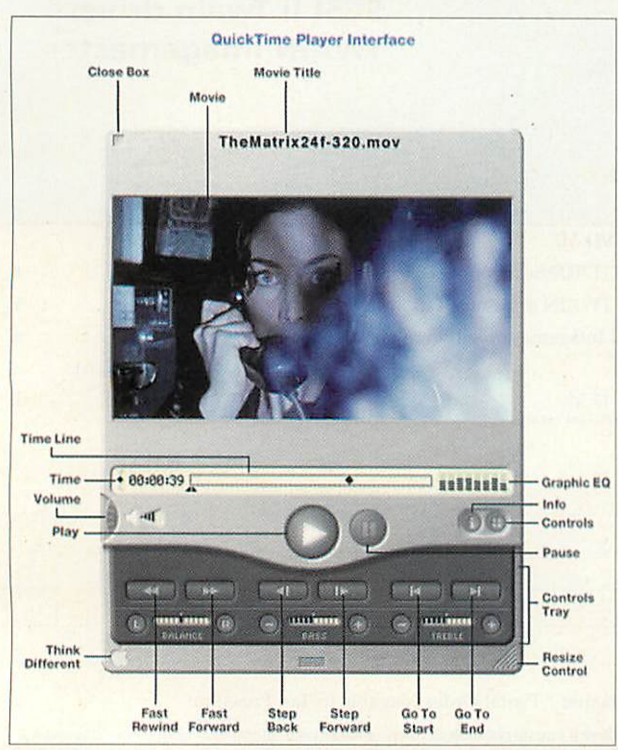
Consistency can even be neatly categorised into parts of the UI that must be identical in all applications through to parts that should be unique. But what about the metaphor? What's flexibility got to do with it? And where does usability figure into all this? Read on dear readers, read on.

A good metaphor allows the user to intuit how to use the interface. There are essentially two kinds of metaphor: abstract ones and real-world ones. The RISC OS desktop uses an abstract metaphor (for a desk, no less). It doesn't really look much like a desk, but it's similar in certain ways. Everything you need to work with is 'on' the desktop, files are located 'in' it, and there's a large flat area in which to work.

The Quicktime interface I discussed last month, on the other hand, uses a real-world metaphor. Here everything looks as much like the real-world object that the software shares most functions with. Being a video/ audio player then, the Quicktime interface looks something like a portable DVD player.

Interfaces that use a real-world metaphor for the desktop have even been attempted (Acorn and Microsoft, to name but two, have had a go). In these you actually see a picture (perhaps in 3D) of a desk inside a room with which you have to interact.

But I've already shown how disastrously wrong Quicktime's interface went. Being real-world allowed immediate familiarity with certain aspects of the interface, but because Quicktime is just one application running on an operating system with its own consistency rules, the user must do more learning to overcome the breaks in consistency.



If that were the only problem, though, there would be nothing wrong with whole operating systems designed with a real-world metaphor. In fact, given some depth, the Quicktime interface would sit quite nicely on the 3D desk of a real-world OS. In this situation Quicktime would be breaking no consistency rules and everyone would know how to use it. But would they want to?

The trouble with real-world interfaces is that they're very restrictive. Just as the designer must limit himself to making it look real, so he limits the functions of the software to those of the real object.

Usability counts

A real portable DVD player is limited to having a very simple interface. Because it's portable, it must be small, which means there is very little space for buttons. The interface, then, consists of a few primarily placed buttons for essential functions such as play, pause and so on. Because it's very cheap to implement, damage resistant and easy to use, a thumbwheel is used to control the volume.

Dynamic feedback is largely tactile in nature — the user knows a button was successfully pressed because it 'clicks' down in some way. Because the screen is so small, all of it must be used to display the movie, leaving further feedback to on-screen indicators overlayed onto the movie, just like TVs. Very few non-essential functions are provided simply because there would be no way to control such extras with a few small buttons.

The Quicktime interface has a few, essential buttons for play, pause and so on. It has a visual representation of a thumbwheel for the volume control. Certain feedback is even provided overlayed onto the movie in version 5 of the software.

Beyond these similarities, the interface has a certain shape and size (you could almost peel it off the screen and hold it in your hand) along with a brushed metal look to complete the picture. The interface clearly succeeds in precisely imitating a real-world object.

It's missing something though. Tactile feedback for starters. Without this the player *must change the* colour of the buttons to indicate when a button is available, when it has been clicked, and when it's the

lity

Sendu Balu challenges Brand X to take the usability test

active function. Sadly, in trying to look like a real-world object (and in trying to also look attractive at the same time), this sort of feedback has been lost. The main buttons look greyed out whether you can click them or not, and it's only when, say, a movie is playing that the play button looks like you can click on it.

It's also missing the ability to use your thumb on that rotary volume control. Instead it seems you have to click at the bottom of the wheel, drag round and up to the top, let go, move back to the bottom and wash-rinse-repeat to increase the volume. The interface designers knew this was a less than easy task so, though the interface doesn't hint at it, you can just click anywhere near the wheel and drag up or down as far as you want, letting the pointer move away from the wheel.

Another problem the designers saw was that a wheel doesn't give any indication of what the volume is. So they cheated and put a little triangle next to the wheel that fills up the louder the volume. It's interesting to note that with version 5 of the software they got rid of all these problems by just using a slider control for the volume instead.

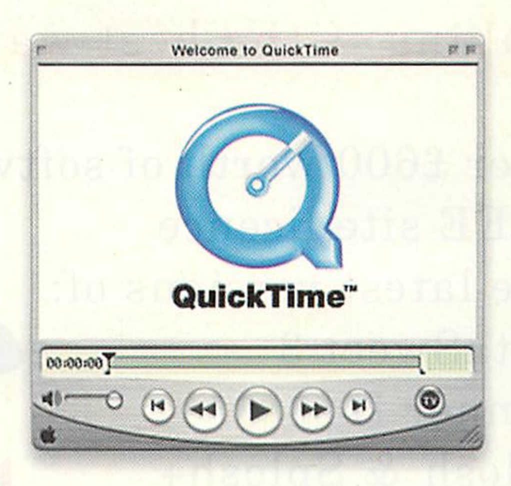
The biggest thing it seems to be missing, however, is functionality. Sure, it seems to be able to do what the portable DVD player can do. But this is an advanced piece of computer software. There's no reason why you shouldn't be able to do a million and one wonderful things with your movie and sound clips. Store them, sort them, mark out favourites, read information about them.

But none of these functions are available in a portable DVD player, so the portables interface can no longer be copied. Instead, the Quicktime designers had to stretch their real-world metaphor approach and integrate a set of drawers at the bottom of the player.

So it's a DVD player with drawers, no problem. You can still imagine peeling it off your screen and holding it, drawers and all. In fact you'll wish you could peel it off your screen, because with the drawers extended the interface takes up a massive amount of screen real estate.

That's if you can get the drawers to extend, because they won't if the bottom of the player is too close to the bottom of the screen. And that's if you'd even want the drawers open, because with their restricted size and art-designed looks, sorting and finding files in the favourites drawer is near impossible (providing file-names for the favourites would have broken the real-world metaphor, so they didn't).

All this could be solved with the use of standard pop-up windows and a normal Filer-like representation of the user favourites, but such windows would be too abstract — when was the last time



you saw a set of interface controls appear out of thin air in front of your walkman?

Real-world bad?

Sticking to a real-world metaphor is extremely difficult when designing an interface. If you're careful not to break any consistency rules, you're likely still left with an interface that isn't very usable on a day-to-day basis. But this isn't always the case. When you have a piece of software that has no more functions than the real-world object it's imitating (and when you won't want to add functions in the future), real-world metaphors can be useful. Take *Calc*, for instance. It looks like a simple calculator and, because it is a simple calculator, the interface is a success.

UltraGUI, of course, must be designed with a very abstract metaphor that isn't going to restrict the number or addition of functions. In a word, he'll have to be flexible.

I made the promise that I would(n't) tell you what UltraGUI looked like this month. He isn't some futuristic 3D desk in a 3D room you'll need a VR suit to use. Rather, being as flexible as he is, he's a very abstract representation of an office. There are things that look like windows and menus, buttons and pinboards. Sort of like RISC OS then? Or more like Windows? Or perhaps most similar to MacOS? We'll see dear readers, we'll see.

END

Quicktime quibbles

Take a long look at the then brand-new interface on the opposite page. Note the greyed-out buttons, thumbwheel and masses of empty space wasted.

Onto a brave new update of the interface. Note the close box that needs to be explained, and lack of other window manipulation tools. What does the 'Think Different' button do? (Nothing). Is the movie paused or playing?

Finally the only-just released Quicktime 5. Note the three window manipulation tools at top, but what do they do? How do you pause/stop a movie? How do you now access the additional controls and info on a clip?

These interfaces become more and more attractive, but are they any more usable?

What's mine is yours

Keep a weather eye on Autoportal from Digitalbrain (020 8879 5300). This is a knowledge sharing platform which enables anyone to go online and create, edit and share knowledge despite lack of technical knowhow.

The first outing for this online software program is into education offering a virtual learning environment. There are a lot of promising features here: an interactive user directory, the ability for users to make their own notes directly online for each page viewed, automatic navigation, simple to upload text, graphics, audio, flash and video, as well as the facility where every page of an autoportal can be delegated to different users. For instance, each class in a school could keep a page/section of the website updated directly online and in real time regardless of previous web page creation knowledge or experience.

A nice touch is that UK focussed educational content is integrated within the portal by Digitalbrain and is compiled by experts using the National Curriculum as their guide.

At present Digitalbrain's Autoportal costs £299 for state primary schools and £599 for state secondary schools. In addition schools are encourages to add £150 to the cost for five teacher training sessions.

Express yourself

Another subscription-only site which is not prepared to stand still, is Espresso. New to the satellite-delivered weekly feeds is the *Special Report*. Aimed at primary schools, the latest report is on the recent conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This Middle East Special Report uses video and web resources to help children investigate the history of the troubles and the challenges for the peacemakers.

A timeline starts in 1917 with links to newspaper reports, video clips and a section on the Key People such as Yasser Arafat, Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton as well as to organisations such as the United Nations.

Suggested classroom activities cover a number of subjects from PSHE to History, English, Geography and RE. On a different note Espresso also hosts a special report on the Harry Potter phenomenon. There are section on the author, characters, the film, Hogwarts and fans of the series.

There are links to newspaper and broadcast news reports, which have been re-dubbed for greater relevance to the National Curriculum and lead to class discussions and exercises. There is a PE link where children are encouraged to recreate the game of Quidditch, as well as activities where children make plays of the books, write book blurbs or use their maths skills to interpret datasheets.

www.espresso.co.uk

In brief

Paper-less planning

Take a look at two new packages from Ascon Education (020 7272 4838). The Ascon Curriculum Planner enables schools to build a coherent and flexible curriculum plan. As a bonus it satisfies the Curriculum 2000 statutory requirements to link ICT across the curriculum, linking to programmes of study in Literacy, Numeracy, Citizenship, Key Skills and Inclusion for each subject. each section of planning is made accessible to all staff at a single click of a button and each year you can easily update plans with the minimum of effort.

In addition, the Ascon Staff Development Software integrates all teaching and support staff development processes for each planning cycle. Central paperwork is removed but staff can still access all the documentation. And for Performance Management, core processes are tracked and personal plans are automatically produced.

Cold and white

If the idea of being stranded for a year on a remote Scottish island appealed to you, give this site the once over. This is the official website of BSES Expeditions 100th expedition which leaves for the Arctic this summer. Results of the research undertaken by the 18 to 20-year olds will be shared with schools and colleges throughout the world via the medium of the Web site. As well as using the concept of online learning communities this Web site aims to raise awareness of important environmental issues.

www.arcticyear.org

Off your chest

Roses.Jellybaby is a RISC OS-specific discussion venue which encourage teachers to share and discuss available resources for education. Meanwhile Educate.Jellybaby is a general RISC OS discussion list where the topics can be general or specific.

roses.jellybaby.net
educate.jellybaby.net

Contacting me

Pam Turnbull:
educ@acornuser.com

Adding data

Steve Turnbull checks out the latest addition to the Softease stable

The biggest problem I had with the *TextEase Database* — the final (?) piece of this amazing puzzle — is where to start. The 'whole' in this selection of programs is far greater than the sum of the parts.

Every time something is added to the package it gets multiplied in value by every other part that it interacts with. So, for example, adding the ability to turn any object in a *TextEase* document into a button that can (let's say) link to a different page, means that instead of adding one feature you're adding as many as there are different types of object.

The addition of the spreadsheet with TeTable was perhaps not as radical as it might have seemed, the treatment of a spreadsheet as another document *object* (rather than an entire document in itself) was brilliant but really a logical progression.

But a spreadsheet is an entity in itself a database is not, well, not really ... is it?

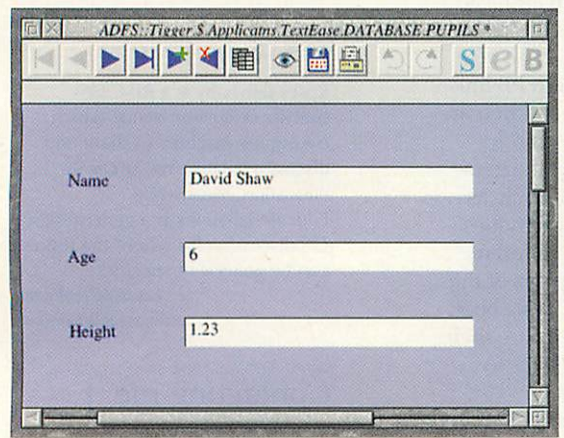
A database is a collection of records and each record is a collection on one or more fields. These records can be ordered based on one or more fields. The question that really arises is: Can a database be sensibly incorporated into a word processor document or should it be the other way around? Softease have come up with a result which is basically the former. Once you've installed the database along with the other *Textease* elements you can create DTP documents, spreadsheets and databases from any one of them and combine them in any pattern you fancy.

Actually the freedom provided is scary and potentially confusing except it's all so straightforward I can't see anyone becoming truly confused.

What do you get?

Database creation has always begun with the specification of the fields you want to use and this is no exception but because this is Textease you need a document to put the database object into first so a quick click on *TeData*'s iconbar icon gets you going with *Form1*. Using *TeTable* or *Textease* itself allows you to create databases as well but the database manipulation icons don't appear on the icon strip for those documents.

Let's say we want to create a database of basic statistics (age and height — shoe size would do as well) in a class for analysis. Using the Database->Add field menu option gives you a field to place which is provided with a title and field entry area automatically. Both these items can be treated as normal Textease objects so can be have various operations carried out on them — the field name can be rotated, though the entry area cannot be. Shadows, line widths, colours and all the rest can be altered.



Initial data entry can be very simple

You could start entering data right now if you wanted to, putting in the name "Joanna Smith" and clicking on the Add record button but this is a bad move at present — the program can get rather upset. As you create fields they are automatically grid locked to make it easier to align them, very handy for the hard of mousing.

Each field is automatically a text field but we can change that easily for the two numeric fields, so we access the field properties window, select integer for age and decimal with two places for height.

Control of input is covered quite comprehensively in the field properties, for example you can control the maximum and minimum values of numbers; specify whether the value given must be unique; make sure the field is a key for sorting; whether data for the field *must* be included; plus it can be of one of the more advanced types.

You can movies, pictures or sounds of which either the information is included in the datafile itself (which could take a lot of space) or it's included as a reference to the original file — though if this is moved the reference fails.

The final data type is a list, this is quite an important feature and shows how a database in Textease is only an object within the document.

Let's say (as is given in an example file) you have a database of animals specified by their type: bird, fish or mammal. In each record you could type in the individual words into a text field. A more efficient option is to create a second database within the document which consists of only one field which contains the different animal types. Then using the list option you can tell Textease that the field is to be made up of one item from all the animal types, then

What you can do with the database

when you click in the field a menu pops up from which you can select the animal type you want.

But how do you create the second database?

Two's company

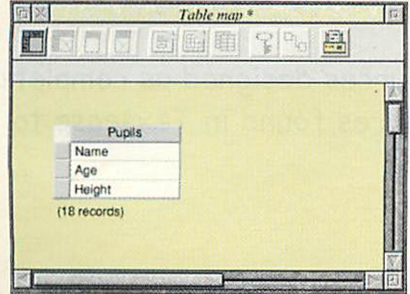
Textease (the DTP program) has only one type of document likewise *TeTable* has just the one. But *TeData* has several: Forms which contain databases fields; Reports that provide table-like displays of the records; Letters that can be used for mail-merging; Queries are used for record selection; and Labels for, surprisingly, printing labels of the data.

But all the Textease drawing facilities are available for all these document types you can add spreadsheets to them if you desire.

However the key document, central to the entire system is the Table Map. This summarises each database, allows you to create new ones, change the fields (adding and deleting) specify which field is the primary key for the database, create new forms for data entry or reports. There is also a feature to allow relationships to be created between fields in different databases but this is not yet available.

Full customisation

As I have been reviewing the Textease Studio I have had access to the full multimedia/presentation capabilities of the package and Textease certainly takes some beating in this area. As I said at the beginning the whole is far beyond the sum of the parts, more like the an exponential of the parts but luckily it's all so logical that it's almost impossible to get it confused and the package won't let you do crazy things.



The table map contains rather different information

The iconbar menu of Textease allows you access to the configuration options which let you switch off or on any or all of the icons on the icon strip, this let's you have simpler commands for different ages. There are some preset options available as well.

But one of the features under the "Link" dialogue box is that you can select most objects as action buttons that will do something when clicked. Among the options available are *every single icon action*. This means that in the process of creating a presentation system you can build a standalone database with only a few options available via buttons on the page. Other objects can be made uneditable.

As yet I haven't gone into charting because, frankly, there's no need. If you go back to my review of the Textease spreadsheet I covered charting there, and it's no different here, basically you create a report, select the portion you want (you can delete columns that are unnecessary) and create the chart as normal — or more than one.

Queries can be activated for forms, reports, letters and tables and it's amazing to watch the selections change on-screen as you alter the query criteria.

Summary

I have to say that I did find a fair number of places where the program crashed due to doing unexpected things and hitting surprising key sequences so it really isn't entirely stable. What it does it does amazingly well and once more Geoff Titmuss has defied convention to bring databases into the *Textease* fold with amazing simplicity and ease of use.

With both Textease as a DTP package and the spreadsheet I would consider them both sensible to use even in a professional environment, even though they are designed primarily for education. This is not the case with the database. It is absolutely perfect for teaching database manipulation and allowing children to create basic databases.

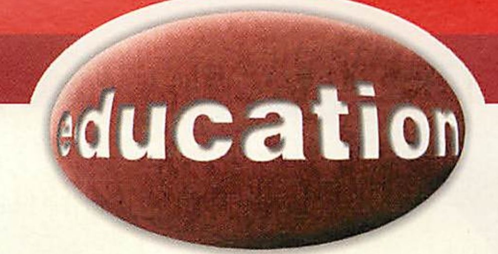
However all data is held in one monolithic chunk on the disc (apart from pictures if you choose to have them external). This means you are memory limited on size and there is a very high risk if data loss occurs. Now I know no one (especially not Softease) claimed that this is a product for business but, as the other programs are so amazing, I thought I had better mention it.

The only real problem I perceived was the very low rendering speed (even on a StrongARM) of the files containing what look like Artworks pictures. The images do appear to be cached once drawn but there can be significant waits.

Next month we'll take a look at the resources that are provided with the system. END

Product details

Product:	Textease Studio (Textease 2000, Textease Primary, Textease Spreadsheet, Textease Database)
Price:	£149 single user £25 per additional user (Database is £39 single user, £10 per additional user)
Supplier:	Softease Ltd, Market Place, Ashbourne, Derbys, DE6 1ES
Tel:	(+44/0) 1335 343421
Fax:	(+44/0) 1335 343422
E-mail:	sales@softease.co.uk
Web:	www.softease.co.uk



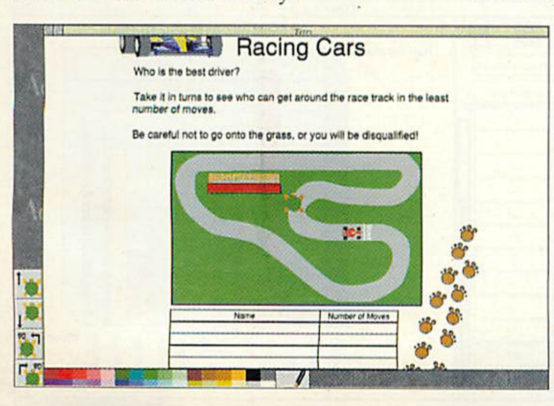
Classroom essentials

Pam Turnbull looks at the collected works of Kudlian Soft brought together on one CD-ROM

If I offered you £600 of software for £60 you would understandably want to know the catch. Perhaps the software was over-priced originally, perhaps was the software was no good - dated or just didn't work. So let's look at what you get for your money.

Kudlian Soft has done just that with 13 of their excellent RISC OS applications on a CD. All of the packages have been archived and can't be run directly from the CD-ROM so must be saved on to floppy or hard disks. A nice touch is that all the software has been pre-registered and comes with a free site licence.

Terry the Turtle was always one of my favourites so I opted to test this beast first. A good introduction to Logo, Terry can also drive a Valiant floor turtle if you have the appropriate leads. Once loaded you're presented with a drawing area and two control bars. Along the bottom of the screen is a colour bar for paper and drawing (or why not load one of the fun backgrounds), while along the side is a selection of tools used to control Terry.



If turtles aren't your thing there are other characters to choose from such as a beetle, a jet, ship or racing car to name a few. Before you start you can also choose the scale and speed of your movements/drawing. There are also four levels to work at. At Level 1 children are introduced to simple forwards, backwards movements and 90 degree right/left turns. Level 2 introduces pen up/down and hide/show turtle, while Level 3 introduces more Logo-like commands with the command line coming in at Level 4. A lovely package which will grow with children's knowledge and confidence.

Word Library was a new utility to me which worked very nicely alongside *Textease*. Initially you must load the library of words you're going to want to use - one of those provided or create your own. Fonts can be specified as can colours and larger lists can be navigated quickly by clicking on the alphabet bar. I particularly liked the fact that you can opt for a space to be automatically added to the end of each word when it is input into your word processed document.

Banner II does what it says - makes large wide banners. Once loaded you are presented with a simple window with a place to type in your banner words and a font menu button. You can also choose between four text sizes. If you opt for *large* you can only have one line of text, whereas *medium* gives you two lines, *small* offers four lines and the *mixed* option gives one line of medium and two lines of small text. You can preview your work and then decide on the effects you want.

As well as changing the font you can justify the text, add shadows, colours, and borders even different fills. When you are finally satisfied the print option lets you know just how long the final banner will be before you opt for scale and type and paper feed. There is even a *reflect* option useful if your printer uses iron-on inks. This means the text is mirrored ready to be ironed on to cloth. Simple and very effective.

Splosh and Splosh+ are two versions of a simple-to-use art package. The original was designed with children with special education needs in mind. With a simple colour bar and a toolbar offering large icons to change brush size as well as ones to paint, spray, fill, undo as well as create circles and ellipses, rectangles,

triangles and lines. You can also add text and use a grid lock feature. All very simple and obvious.

The later version gives you more colours and tools. There is more control over the size of brush with a lock feature too. Additional tools are a stamp with some ready-made images (and you can add to this) as well as copy and magnify functions with an additional pipette tool for acquiring colours from your artwork. This version also has a multiple undo/redo feature and more advanced text controls.

While the earlier version loads Draw and Sprite files, *Splosh+* allows you to import JPEG, BMP and Splosh images as well as squashed and unarchived Sprite and Draw files. The CD-ROM comes with selection of clip-art for you to use here and elsewhere along the themes of the alphabet, birds and food.

Staying with artwork is Gallery. This utility allows you to find and display selections of Draw, Sprite and JPEG files. Quite simply *Gallery* searches your hard disk for these images, counting or fitting eight to one page. After you've made your selection you can see an individual image in more detail or print your graphics with the option of including the full filename/pathname of each image. A good tool for keeping tabs on your artwork.

A similarly useful tool is Portfolio. This displays graphics (Sprite, Draw, Splosh, JPEG, PCX, GIF, BMP, PhotoCD, RLE and Replay files) and plays any associated sound effect. This can be used to create simple multimedia presentations.

All you have to do is create a directory for the images you want to use putting them into alphanumeric order in which they are displayed. If you want to add sounds it is very simple too, as is adding fades, the time an image is displayed or whether you want a continuous presentation. You can also opt for an automatic display or a manual one with control buttons. For the more advanced there is the option to create PortFolio scripts.

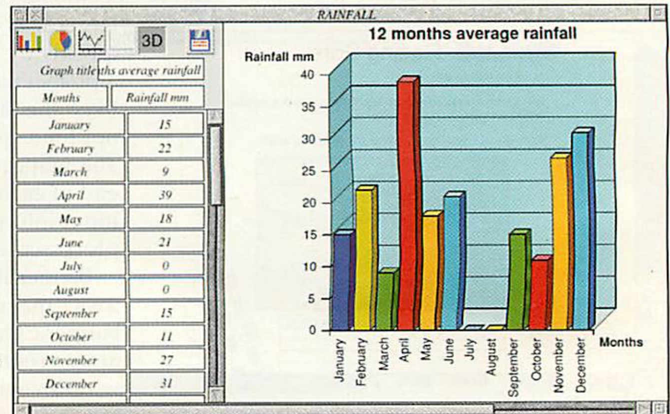
Moving onto Calendar here you'll find yourself looking at the current month and year and a blank space waiting for an image. You can opt to start the week on any day though by default this is Monday. You can also decide if you want 1, 2 or 12 months per page and change the year and month your are working on as well as the style of text. If you press the memo button the calendar changes to allow you to add a comment to each day of the month. You can print the year or month without an image in place ready for a handmade concoction or add your own images.

For those with a data-handling bent Kudlian have a good selection. Starting with Pictogram, this does what just what it says. An open and blank program offers you a selection of picture sets from books to vegetables.

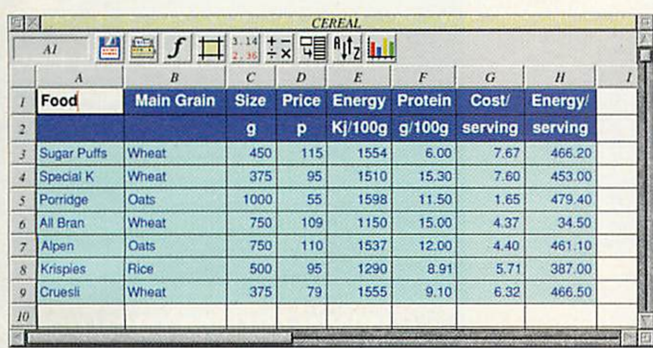
All you have to do is to drag the relevant number of images into the pictogram to match your frequency table or tally chart results. And if you're not happy with a pictogram you can change the style of the chart to block or bar graph without having to re-enter the data. These styles give more control over the names of the items and whether the chart is vertical or horizontal. Whichever you choose the final version can be named and printed.

DataSweet 3 is itself a collection of five data-handling utilities and programs which work alone or together. *DataPlot* is a graph drawing package. Fill in the grid with title, labels and numbers (negative or positive values) and then choose between bar, pie, scatter, line graphs or opt for a 3D option. Each graph type has a range of options and final versions can be printed or saved as data or as a drawfile.

The trio of utilities *DataPick*, *DataCard* and *DataFind* which act as







Food	Main Grain	Size	Price	Energy	Protein	Cost/	Energy/
		g	p	Kj/100g	g/100g	serving	serving
Sugar Puffs	Wheat	450	115	1554	6.00	7.67	466.20
Special K	Wheat	375	95	1510	15.30	7.60	453.00
Porridge	Oats	1000	55	1598	11.50	1.65	479.40
All Bran	Wheat	750	109	1150	15.00	4.37	34.50
Alpen	Oats	750	110	1537	12.00	4.40	461.10
Krispies	Rice	500	95	1290	8.91	5.71	387.00
Cruesli	Wheat	375	79	1555	9.10	6.32	466.50

database templates along the line of a card index database. DataPick uses key pictures to classify information. While DataFind uses individual fields and DataCard opts for keywords to classify data. Powerful and versatile with searching and sorting facilities as you'd expect.

Finally there is *DataCalc* which is a simple spreadsheet with the normal basic tools to control text and cell styles as well as formula, auto re-calculation and graphing.

For more sophisticated spreadsheet functions you'll need DataSheet II. This is an enhanced version of *DataCalc*. Not only can sheets be bigger - up to 256 rows, there is a larger toolbar and more control over styles. Columns can be dragged to the desired width and selected areas can be re-styled, sorted, graphed or protected with data imported or exported as CSV or TSV files. A fully working spreadsheet.

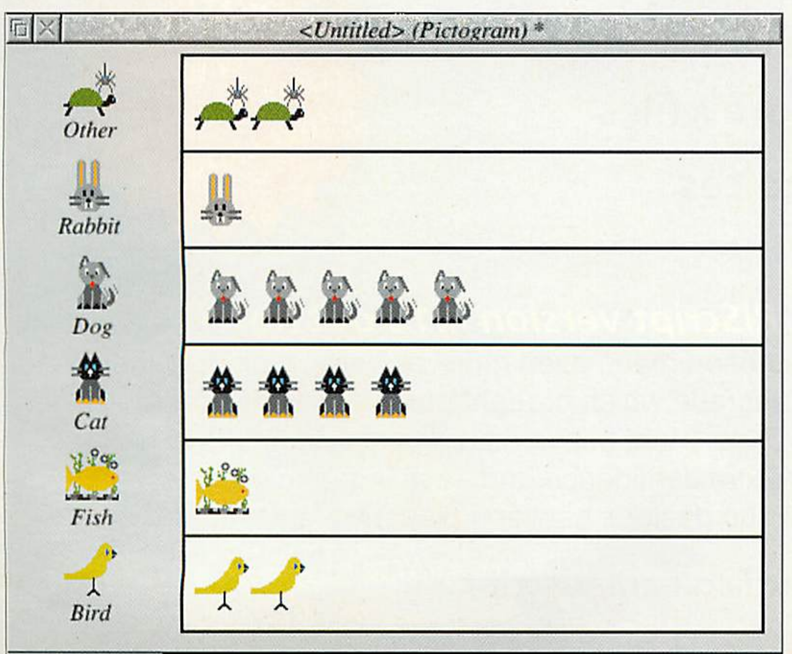
For another approach to datahandling there is ReTreeval. This is a decision tree or branching database and is used in Science and ICT at Year 4 and beyond. You start with specifying the topic by answering the questions *Everything we are going to talk about is a ...* From then on you specify questions and answers to distinguish animals, foods, sports, in fact anything you want. You data can be displayed as a tree or as a graph using DataPlot. A neat little program which should be more widely used.

RepTile is the final program under the spotlight and again is one of my favourites. Quite simply this allows you to make tiling patterns from squares, triangles or hexagons. You are presented with two windows, one of an individual tile, one of a bank of tile shapes.

The individual tile is the one you can manipulate by moving dragging points to make a new shape even adding additional points to make more complex shapes. In addition the toolbar offers you the chance to copy or cycle sides of the tile, draw new shapes with you choosing line and fill colours. Tiles can also be rotated or reflected in three, four or six ways depending on your chosen shape.

When you're happy with your tile you can stamp it on to some or all of the tile bank individually or following a line or specified block. All done in the second window saving or printing your finished design.

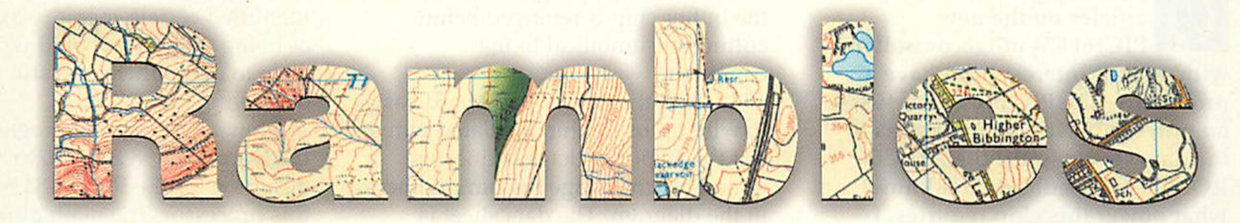
So what is the catch? As far as I can tell the only problem is a lack of documentation. Manuals have been replaced by a loose-leaf binder containing printouts of the original manuals and Kudlian intend to move this on to the CD-ROM as PDF files. As printing manuals is more costly than running off a CD-ROM I can see their point. These are 13 classic programs which no RISC OS machine should be without. Let's just say that Christmas has come rather early this year. END



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RISC OS



Mike Cook puts his walking boots to one side

No rambling this month, we're already sitting in the pub by a roaring log fire so it's over to Don Scott who has something to say to Michael McConnell who wanted to run his A4 laptop from a 12 volt source as described in the November Rambles.

I "As I have used an A4 from a 12V vehicle battery for a few years I have a few suggestions. Firstly the A4's internal battery pack consists of 12 Cs (Sub C) size 1.7Ah Ni-Cads giving a nominal 14.4V. Despite this the A4 continues to work down to between 10.5 — 11V thus operation from a 12V battery is OK, but you will not be able to run it down as far as in other applications.

"That said I have run an A4 from a 60 Ah car battery for four days continuously without any kind of recharging, so it is not too bad. There is no need to try to connect up through the battery connectors, you can go in through the 9-way power D on the back (pins 4 and 9 0v, pin 1 +12v). The only thing to note is that after setting the machine running on an external 12V supply you will need to unplug the internal 14.4V pack otherwise the A4 *will* run this down to 12V first, thus virtually exhausting it!

"There are no regulator dissipation problems, when the A4 is running on its mains pack it puts in 20V onto the regulator while a separate output charges the Ni-Cads from a constant current source. It is possible (with care!) to open the battery packs and replace the Ni-Cads. Usefully, Cs size Ni-Mh batteries are now available which are much less prone to "memory" effects and are 30% higher capacity(2.2 Ah) which give nearly four hours battery life"

Guido Avidano is doing sterling work interfacing motors but wants to move faster:

Q "I read very often your articles in *Acorn User* and for this reason I think you are the right person to ask to. My small project is to drive a stepping engine under RISC OS 4 (via the parallel port), using an external board with an L297 and a L298N chips fitted on it.

"The problem is to control the speed (3.5~4.9 turns/sec. at the moment) at faster rates, without loss of precision. The question is simple: is it possible to improve this speed under RISC OS 4 without adding more hardware? If not, can you suggest me which kind of external timer I have to add, and how to drive it?"

A The chips you are using are stepping motor drive chips so all they need is a pulse to advance the motor. You don't say how many steps your motor has per revolution, typically this is between 48 and 200. So at your top speed you are producing pulses at between 235Hz to 980Hz, which is about the top speed you could expect from a BASIC program. As I see it if you want to go faster you have two problems, producing faster pulses and accuracy.

All Acorn computers have built-in counter timers and there are normally a few free. You can use one of these to generate a fast, regular, interrupt and then use the interrupt service routine to pulse your stepping motor every *n* times it is entered. Where the value of *n* will control the speed.

Of course this interrupt service routine needs to be in machine code but you can use a memory location to contain the *n* value that you can then poke values in with a BASIC program. The best thing I can do is to point you to my August 94 article in *Acorn Computing* "Chaos from a dripping tap" at **www.doc.mmu.ac.uk/Acorn/BodyBuild/BB94.html**

In this I used an internal timer to generate an interrupt and the interrupt service routine incremented a count that I then used to accurately time the intervals between drips from a tap. The software has most of the structure you want.

Your next problem is accuracy. All stepping motors have what is known as a pull-in speed, that is a maximum speed from a standing start. The problem is that the torque drops off with speed and so the maximum speed depends upon the capability of the motor and the load it is under.

Therefore to get a motor to go at it's maximum speed you have to ramp it up. This is tricky to control in software, and it is also tricky knowing how fast is the maximum speed and how fast it should accelerate. Too fast and you lose accuracy.

The previously mentioned Michael McConnel, a busy hardware builder, is having trouble with his PIC project:

Contacting AU

Mike Cook:
rambles@acornuser.com



"I have been reading your articles on the new PIC16F874 microcontroller with a lot of interest but I have a problem — the PIC blows 1A fuses on power up. Not having access to the data sheets (until the AU CD-ROM is released) I do not know what power this chip requires. I have checked the wiring for shorts.

"So, What current does the PIC require? And can the 74HCT125 be placed on the same board as the PIC — I find I haven't the dexterity or patience to build it in to the 25-way D-Type plug?

"Although you advocate the PLCC version of the PIC it is only really suitable for a PCB. Much more work is required to wire it on a round pad Eurocard — but perhaps I misunderstood your article in the September issue of *Acorn User*. The 40 pin DIL version although having a larger footprint is easier to wire on a stripboard and is cheaper"



Please note that in the latest circuit printed the last article had Vss and Vdd connections shown the wrong way round. Sorry about this. The current taken by this chip (with no I/O loading) is about 7 to 15 mA if running at 20MHz, slightly less if slower. So it is almost certain that it is the wrong way round, if it doesn't get too hot you might get away with it but it looks like you might have killed it.

There is no problem with putting the buffer on the board, the only thing is that you will have to do this on each design you make. However, I did find that I was getting a bit of trouble when I had a complex project and the programming module connected. What was happening was that the PIC seemed to be crashing after about 30 seconds when connected to the computer and not when it was free standing.

I cured this by holding the program pin RB3 low when running instead of letting it float. I did this in software, but an alternative would be to put a 10K pull-down on this pin. If you include these buffers on your final board make sure that the inputs are tied to the appropriate level or the buffer chip is removed before cutting the umbilical to the computer.

I found the square pad board easy to wire up using thin insulated wires but the 40 pin package is fine, just remember to change the pin numbers in the diagram. The data sheet is available on the *Acorn User* Web site, and it should be on the CD with this issue.

Richard Ashbery is also working with the PIC and has a few more problems:



"I am using your *ICP* programmer to 'blow' a PIC16F874. The program reports 'blown OK' but fails verify. Here are two examples:

```
Program memory fail at 2EF : Read
3F7D should be 3F6D
Program memory fail at 38F : Read
387F should be 307F
```

"I have used the hex file — *SerialIO/H* (generated from your source code *SerialIO* on the *Acorn User* Dec 1998 RTR disc). Could the hex file be at fault here? Can anything be usefully obtained from the saved 'hex' file generated by the *ICP*.

"Another query concerns the RS232 serial port and MAX202 level translator. Being a complete 'PIC' novice am I right in thinking that in order to use the Serial PIC monitor program (*SerialPIC* program from RTR in *Acorn User* Dec 98) the PIC flash memory must have a correctly blown and verified PIC image before it will work?"



When it says *Blown OK* it actually does a read back after each individual program word. What I really need to know is do you have code in that area of memory and is it reporting the numbers you expect to see correctly? Have you tried doing a whole chip erase and then trying again?

The saved hex file contains all the locations of the chip, even the blank ones, and can be used to read in a device that you have not programmed or one that you suspect as being faulty. In that way if you identified certain memory locations as being faulty you could write your code to avoid them and still use the device.

Now the serial I/O program from the December 98 *Acorn User* was designed for the PIC16C84 not for this processor. The main difference being that the 874 can run at 20MHz where as the 16C84 can only run at 4MHz with the 16F84 running at 10MHz.

The code generates a serial port by using software delays and so if the processor is running at a different speed the delay loops won't produce the same delays. A much better solution with the 874 would be to use the internal serial port. Mind you the numbers you feed into the baud rate generator are processor-clock dependent.

The Serial Port monitor program simply passes bytes back and forth like a simple terminal emulator, so you do need a PIC that knows how to respond to these bytes, that is programmed. The monitor communicates at 9600 baud so the PIC must be able to send at this speed.

Finally Clive Musselwhite is having a problem with his CDs, he writes:



"I hope you don't mind me asking for some advice with a CD ROM error message I get from a Risc PC600, OS 3.5 For no apparent reason it refuses to load CDs displaying the error message 'SLCD' and if you persist no 'TOC' information found."



Sadly the Acorn CDFS isn't very good at coping with all CD formats. I had a lot of trouble with the extended attributes CD format produced by NASA. I think that TOC stands for "Table Of Contents" and basically it's part of the directory structure.

Assuming there is no damage to your CD I would suggest you try the WSS version of the CDFS. I have found that this will read CDs that the Acorn system won't, unfortunately you do have to pay for it but it is well worth it.

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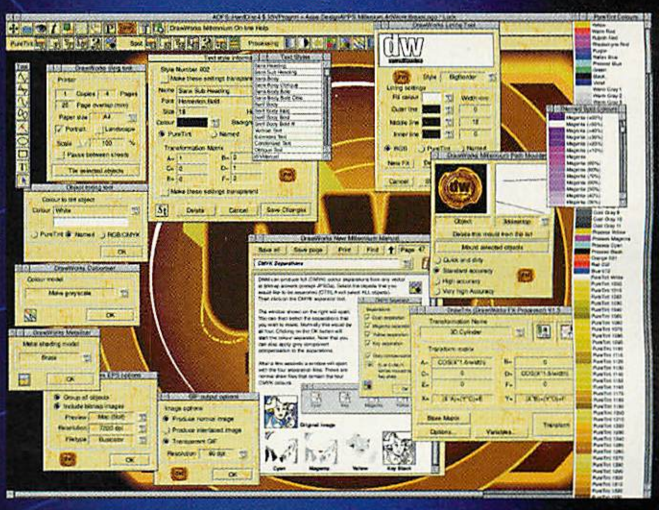
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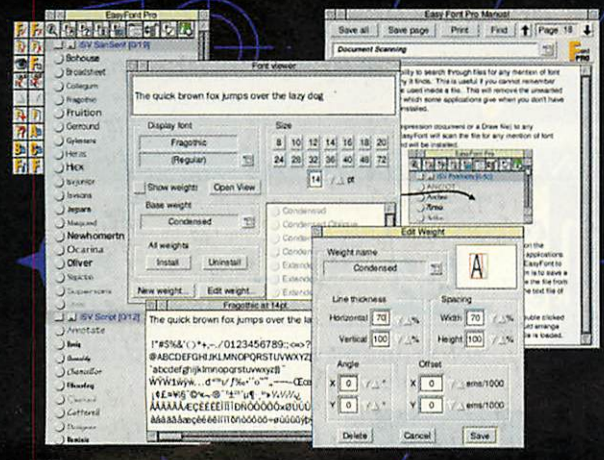
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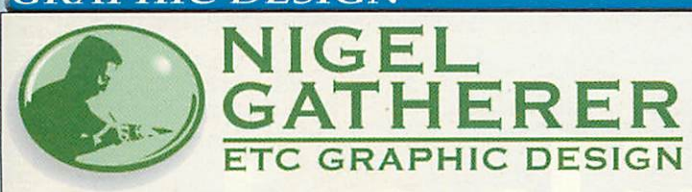


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Tying it all

I write in response to Chris Bell's forthright letter (January 2001) on the importance of the RISC OS software market. It is perhaps a coincidence that when I picked up my copy of Acorn User from Cambridge WHSmith this afternoon, only moments later, a guy came up to me and asked where I got it — I handed him another copy from the top shelf. We started talking, and although it turned out that he hadn't worked on a Risc PC for years, he was interested in what was going on. I mentioned the new Omega, and he said "Yes, I've heard about that. The problem is that not enough software is being developed any more."

For many people, the software that is available for RISC OS at the moment is more than enough for their needs. This may be so, but in places what is on offer is not enough to attract new users to the platform — or in the case of this chap in WHSmith — old users back to the platform.

Chris mentions the pivotal RISC OS Products Database (**productsdb.riscos.com**). As it stands at the moment, it is useful. However it could do with some more work.

If we are to assume that Omega is finally released in Q1 2001, together with RiscStation's laptop, I — like Chris — would very much like to see software development and promotion moving up in eminence. Omega is being "bundled with software classics *Pipedream 4*, *EasiWriter* and *Fireworks Pro*" to quote Microdigital's advert. This is great, but only EasiWriter gives file compatibility with the outside world. Shouldn't RISCOS Ltd be hassling Logotron to allow the further development of *Eureka* — that actually supports *Lotus123* and *Excel* read/write?

The Internet is the final hurdle. Actually, no, it's more of a barrier. I find it almost an insult that Castle use the expression "enable you to harness the full potential of the Internet" in their adverts for the Kinetic RiscPC and Oregano. As far as I am aware, the latter doesn't even come with a disc cache yet! As "Alan" reiterates in his letter, much more is needed.

As someone who teaches in a school that has RISC OS computers, one of the primary reasons why we have recently installed an NC server, and are now running Windows 2000 on our first-generation RiscPCs, is that *Internet Explorer 5* is free. Together with Free e-mail clients, like *Eudora*, they actually do enable you to harness the full potential of the Internet. Elwyn Morris's investment into Clares's internet access package could have paid for a second-hand PC which would actually have enabled truly advanced internet access.

The RISC OS market will find, over the next couple of years, that its users will migrate ever-more quickly into other realms if this major software issue is not addressed. There is nothing wrong with the speed of my StrongARM RiscPC that I bought in December 1996. New hardware is crucial, and is apparently upon us. Let us now see the spotlight move onto Software. Perhaps PACE will bring our Internet software into the 21st century? We can but hope.

Andrew Harmsworth
by e-mail

About that map...

I was very impressed by the quantity of dealers on the map you published

Education mad

Following the creation of the RISC OS Education Mailing List, a proposal was made to create a pool of RISC OS resources useful in education, to be available on the internet.

The RISC OS Education Resources website contains files in Impression, Textease, Draw, Pipedream, EasiWriter, Ovation and other formats, for use in education.

The files include worksheets, handouts, over-head transparencies, posters, magazine templates, and much more. They cover a wide range of subject areas, and are divided up into Key Stage areas and more general resources (for those not familiar with Key Stages, the FAQ explains roughly the age-ranges where each is applicable).

These resources are freely available for use in education thanks to the generous support of the RISC OS users who have donated them. So, if you're involved in education and use RISC OS, do have a good look round the Web site, and you're sure to find something of use!

The pool of resources continues to grow, and if you have similar resources that might be useful to others, your material would be very welcome too. Please check out the website for detailed instructions on how to send in files.

RISC OS Education Resources
www.jellybaby.net/rougol/roses.html



together

in the January issue but I was a biut confused over the numbers and different sorts of dealers and what about the ones that don't say whether they sell Castle or Riscstation machines? And what about the Omega? Could you explain it?

Peter Latham
by e-mail

Sorry if it was confusing, anyway it's quite simple: The dealers who have all their deyails listed will supply you with any machine — they are not specific to any particular brand and that includes Microdigital's Omega.

The Castle and Riscstation-specific dealers will (probably) only supply the machine from the company concerned. If you want to find out exactly who they are you just need to ring Castle (01728 723200) or Riscstation (01942 797777) and ask.

Getting more power

Well, I installed a new hard drive along with RISC OS 4 on my SA RiscP C over the Christmas period. What a difference the new *Printers* makes to the Spacetech Photoreal driver for my Canon 7100. It was practically useless until RISC OS 4 and new *Printers* were installed. So I guess there are at least two printers (Canon and Epson) with their apropriate drivers that will give as good a print as that other platform. Has anyone else noticed the marked difference with RO3.7 and RO4 with their Canon 7100 I wonder.

Phil Coates
by e-mail

David Atkins

Microdigital have been considered the Cinderella of the RISC OS hardware market but is that really fair? We asked to talk to David Atkins and he kindly agreed to answer our questions though reluctant since he doesn't consider personalities to be the important part of the market: "I am sure your readers quite rightly could not give a damn about who I am."

I think we'll just let David take it from here: "I was very lucky to grow up on a farm just 15 miles from the centre of London. I had a very happy childhood with my parents, sister and grandmother. I was doubly lucky to be surrounded by a large extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins who were ruled over by my grandmother a formidable women.

"The farm was approximately 600 acres and this was our playground, latter during school holidays I took a growing interest interest in the farm, which was based on milk and pig production.

"The dairy herd was a mixture of Dairy shorthorns and Friesian cattle with two Jersey cows to improve the cream content. Today the farming methods involved would be described as organic that's to say the cattle lived in fields eating grass with a supplement of brewers grains from the local brewery eaten twice a day during milking.

"The garden adjacent to the house was completely enclosed and laid out on classical lines with paths edged with box hedges, I mention this only because the garden was full of rare fruit trees planted by a gardener who sailed with Captain Cook, mostly they were very good to eat."

> The situation is very much improved

So your early employment was as a farm hand? "As I remember it involved a lot of early mornings, sweeping and tea-making for little or no reward. My father explained the ritual as coming to terms with the realities of life. So on reflection my advice is that the rituals associated with one's first job should be avoided at all cost.

"My career in computers started when I joined my cousin's company working on their IBM 370 computer, this had several advantages in so much as the job was very much more interesting, the pay was very much better and the lunches were very good, almost exclusively spent in a small Italian restaurant in Soho Square, sadly it's no longer with us."

So how did you get into the Acorn market? "Turned left at Fort Worth straight ahead to Oak Computers, right into Oak Solutions and on towards the meaning of life."

And where were you and what were you doing when Kennedy was shot .... oops no I mean, when you heard that Acorn pulled the plug? "Working on finishing the Medi computer but it was clear to me that Acorn was worth far more dead than alive so their action, while unwanted, came as no surprise. But with four companies now developing or selling a variety of computers it was the best thing to happen for all concerned."

How do you feel the RISC OS market is going to develop? "It would be foolish to believe that everything in the garden is rosy when clearly it is anything but. That said there are signs that the situation is very much improved with both individuals and schools re-accessing and purchasing the new RISC OS computers in increasing numbers.

"How the market develops will depend on several factors from the number of hardware developers, to the operating system, applications and marketing these issues will determine the growth of the market which can be achieved, and this in turn will determine the number of manufacturers which the market can support. It's the usual circular argument."

Are you optimistic for the future? "I am very optimistic about MicroDigital's future we have a well-developed business plan which has already established us as a major player and our development projects have achieved their targeted performance therefore I can see no reason at this stage for any change of direction, so it's onward and upward."

Steve Turnbull

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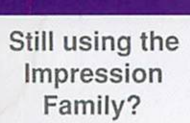
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